PRIVATE EYE

£1

No. 861
Friday
16 Dec. '94

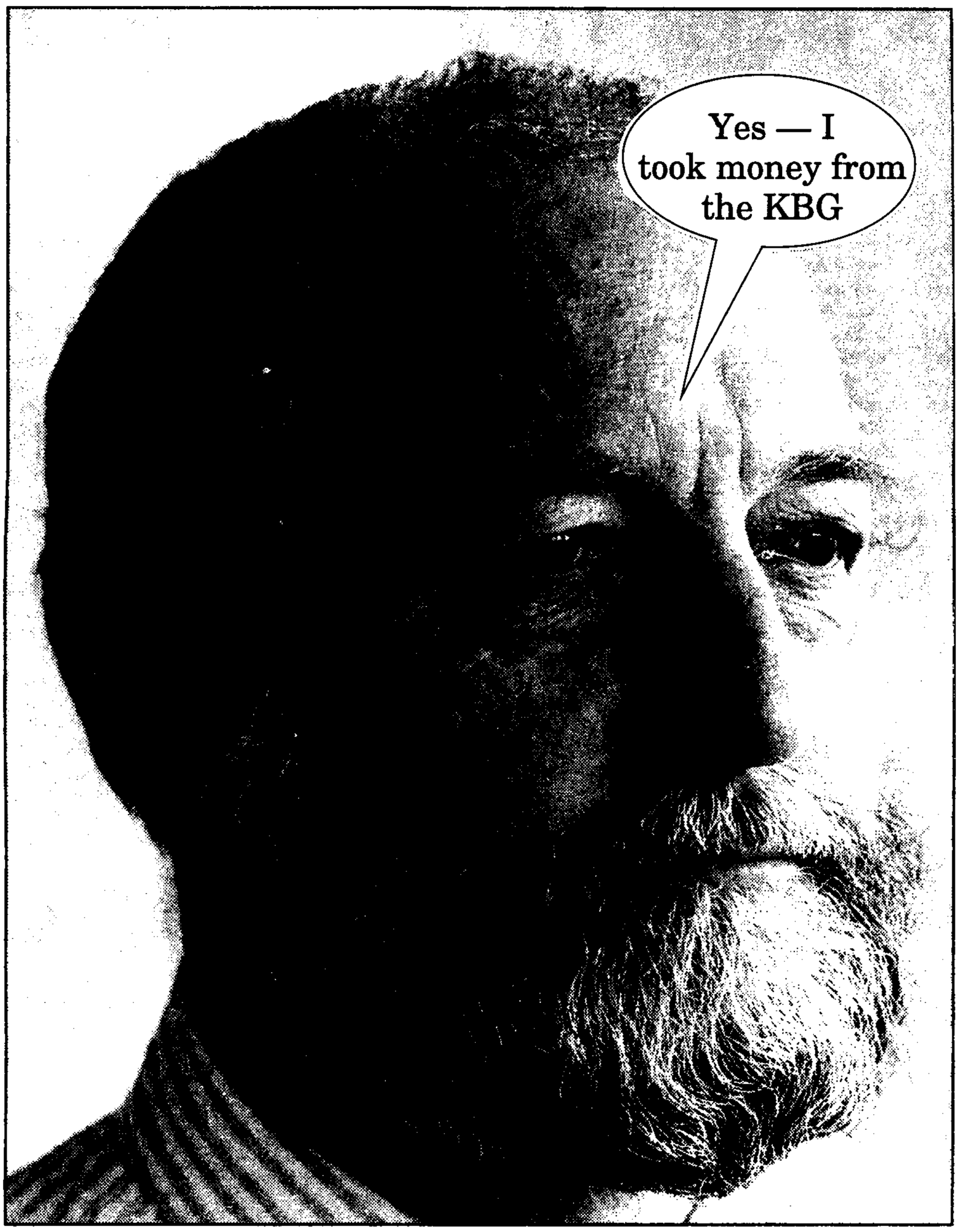
MERRY CRISISMAS!

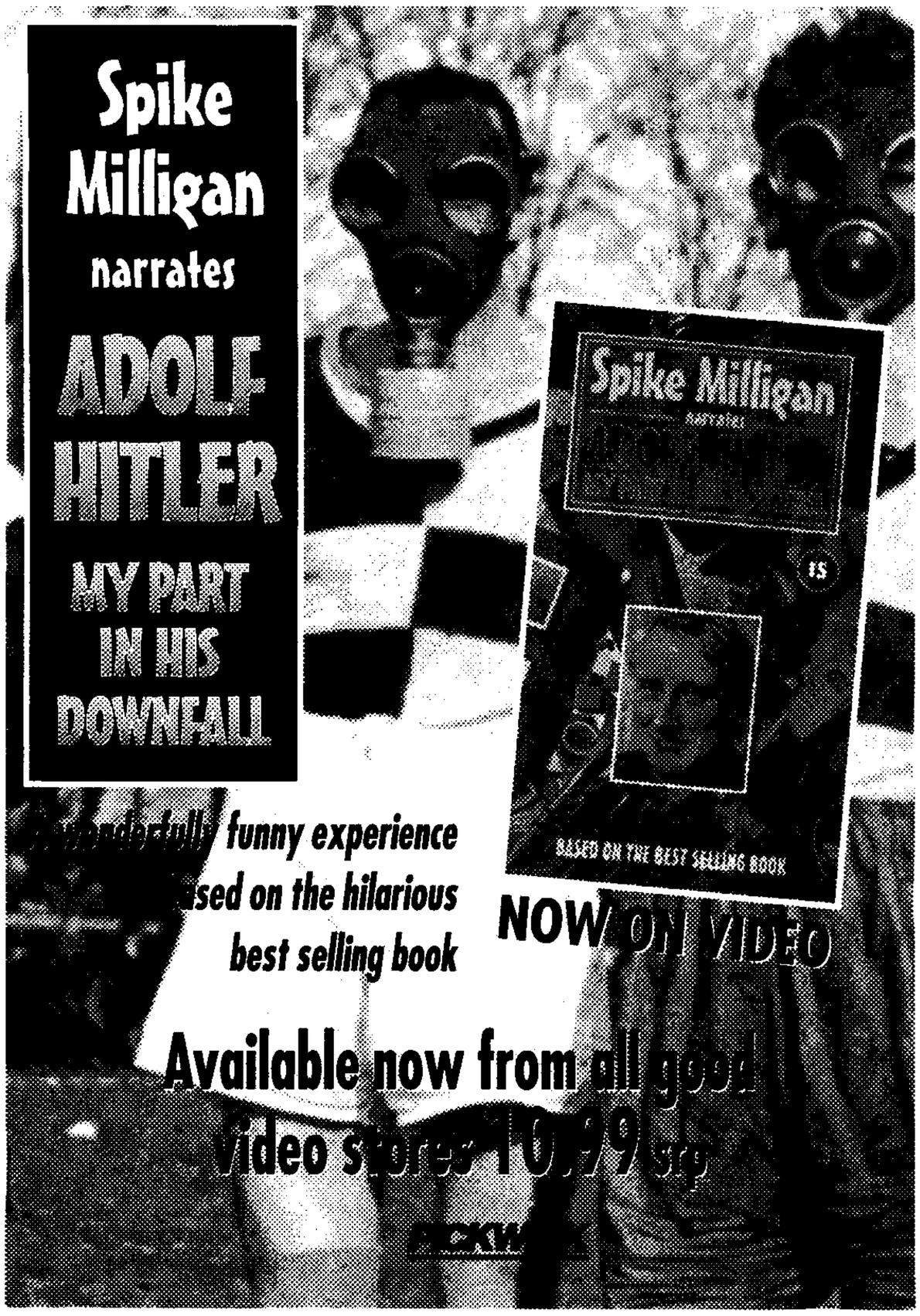
shy mongrel

shy mongrel
shy mongrel
shy mongrel

PRIVATE SPY

Guardian man confesses





Have we got news for you.

As, with a hey nonny nonny
we skip merrily into our missing
word round we see that the
MICRO CORRECT POCKET pen
from Pentel is one point ahead.
The point in question being
its rather fine, free flowing tip
which won't dry up and delivers
correction fluid only when
and where you need it.
Which, when compared with the
mess and waste of other products
makes it the odd one out. Correct.

Pentel

GRRREAT EXPECTATIONS

GRRRAHAM'S

Just roll it
round your tongue.

W. & J.
GRAHAM'S
PORT

Gnome

IT IS with great regret that I have to announce the resignation of Mr David Spart from the staff of the Gnomiad.

Mr Spart, known affectionately round the office as "Old Spartie", has long been a close colleague and was a distinguished literary editor here for many years.

However, last week I learned, to my shock, that he held a range of extremist left wing views which are incompatible with his position on a left wing newspaper.

A number of his articles have now been drawn to my attention, including "Ho Chi Minh: A Total and Utter Hero", "Che Guevarra: Basically, er, a Man of Destiny", "Eric Honneker: Don'tcha Love Him?" and "Why Mrs Thatcher's Police State is actually much more sickening than anything the Communists ever did, er (continued page 94)".

It is, however, typical of Dave Spart's sense of honour and decency that he should have agreed to resign when I told him he was sacked.

E. Strobes
pp. Lord Gnome
The Gnomiad
Farrleft Road
Moscow Golders Green
London

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COLOUR SECTION

DECISION MAKERS, the lobbying company which generously sponsors functions in John Major's constituency, has recently managed to persuade the government to site the intermediate Channel tunnel link station at Blue Circle's otherwise useless ex-cement works at Ebbsfleet.

This spectacular success will not have come as a surprise to regular visitors to the Tory party conference, however.

At the 1993 conference a fringe transport meeting played host to a fascinating crowd of interested parties. First there was the then transport secretary, John MacGregor. The speaker giving the vote of thanks — and supplying the sausage rolls and quiche — was Maureen Tomison, chair of Decision Makers. Dame Angela Rumbold MP was also present. As a member of Decision Makers board, she chaired the meeting.

The other speaker was Mark Pinnington, head of the Ebbsfleet project for Blue Circle. He told the meeting that developers had learnt from past experience the importance of getting infrastructure provided first. Little did those present realise he would take his own advice only a year later and have an international train station on his site.

ANY friend of Malcolm Edwards, who left British Coal amid acrimony after fighting to save the industry, is no friend, it seems, of Neil Clarke, the splenetic chairman of BC.

Clarke has lashed out at two of his critics by having their names crossed off the list for British Coal's Christmas lunch. They were Mary Fagan of *The Independent*, and Gerard McCloskey, managing editor of the influential newsletter *Coal UK*, which is owned by the *Financial Times*. Their crime was to be too sympathetic to Edwards.

The boycott backfired of course when correspondents from the *Daily Torygraph*, *Grauniad*, *Financial Times* and Wapping *Times* declined to attend out of solidarity. But why such animosity to those who appear sympathetic to Edwards?

Edwards has his own consortium and had wanted to buy some of the coal pits but was rejected by Tim Eggar, the energy minister. Eggar sold all the English pits to Richard Budge, boss of an opencast mining company, who offered more money; and Edwards has since cast doubt on whether Budge can create a viable industry on the basis of his generous tender. Fagan and McCloskey both reported his doubts.

There is still bitterness about the way Edwards rocked the boat before leaving the British Coal management; and Fagan has reported that up to 70 BC managers are likely to be given jobs by Budge. There has not, of course, been any suggestion that British Coal advanced the interests of Budge.

Meanwhile in the gathering tension over coal privatisation there are signs that Eggar is losing what little cool he had. In a recent speech he warned certain unnamed people to be more cautious and complained of "disinformation and unpleasant innuendo" being levelled at Budge.

WHATEVER the cause of cot deaths, recent investigations have shown the government's rules and regulations to be absurd.

This could explain the government's reluctance to investigate properly the connection between cot deaths and the fire retardant fillings in cot mattresses.

The first ludicrous fact is that cot mattresses' never have to be tested for toxicity unless they include a PVC covering or polyurethane-coated fabric. The fillings could be made of pure antimony, a fire retardant that has been linked with cot deaths, so long as the cover is not toxic. (Rules *are* in place for children's toys: a mattress in a toy pram is thoroughly tested for toxicity. So at least a child's dolly will be all right.)

The lack of toxicity testing can be compared with the care taken in flammability tests — although few people can see how a baby can set fire to itself. Not only that, but what is the use of a flameproof mattress when the baby has sheets and covers which are not fire resistant?

The department of trade and industry has logged cases of fire accidents involving childcare items in sample hospitals over a 12-year period. The research yielded just eight cases, most of which were for smoke effects and none was fatal. The department extrapolated the figures to conclude that no more than 100 cases had occurred in more than a decade. Babies suffering from smoke effects is serious, but the numbers are much smaller than for the number who die from cot deaths.

Is it possible to have a fire retardant, toxic free mattress? It is. But while retailers like Mothercare took the hint about the fire retardant link to cot deaths long ago, the cot mattress manufacturers have been much slower. Many still choose to cut costs and use the cheapest fire retardants — antimony and phosphorous compounds — which have been linked to cot deaths. Perhaps it's time for the government to do some governing in this area.

WHILE Active Learning and Leisure has been convicted of the corporate manslaughter of teenage canoeists, and Peter Kite, its managing director, has been jailed for a combination of greed and cost-cutting, the company's three main shareholders have got off without even a mention.

They were of course named in the *Eye* on 8 October 8: an investment company owned by the Thatcherite carpet king Sir Philip Harris; a subsidiary of British American Tobacco (chairman Sir Patrick Sheehy); and the investment company 3i, whose former chairman was Sir John Cuckney.

All three were shareholders in the leisure company at the time of the fatal "accidents" in March last year. But shortly before they heard they might be named as shareholders on a Channel Four *Despatches* programme in May, all three sold up.

GORDON ANGLESEA, a 57-year-old former superintendent in the North Wales police, collected £375,000 in libel damages last week, including £80,000 from *Private Eye*, after a high court jury found in his favour against four defendants — the *Observer*, the *Independent on Sunday*, the *Eye* and Harlech TV.

After deliberating for a day and a half, the jurors told the judge that they couldn't reach a unanimous verdict. He said that he would accept a majority decision. Shortly afterwards they returned to the courtroom and announced that, by a majority of ten to two, they had found in Anglesea's favour. They then retired again to consider how much to award him in damages.

Although the judge had warned them not to treat it as a "national lottery", the defendants were understandably apprehensive — and, when it was discovered that the plaintiff was willing to consider an offer from the other side, the defence lawyers swiftly reached a settlement: *Private Eye* and the *Observer* would pay £80,000, while the *Independent on Sunday* and Harlech TV each agreed to pay £107,500. The four defendants would also, of course, pay the huge costs of the case.

The *Eye* is not however launching an appeal to readers this time. Thank you for the enquiries.

● *After Lyme Bay 15* ● *Gott and Spies 8* ● *Books of the Year 27* ● *Hallo! to Teddy, Jason and Miguel 7* ● *Footnotes 28,29* ● *Serious Farce Office 30*

Street of Shame

A RECENT piece by the *Financial Times*'s political editor Philip Stephens suggested that Peter Lilley and the other cabinet "bastards" regarded John Major as a weak leader.

No surprises there, you might think. But for some reason Lilley took offence and wrote Stephens a stiff letter of complaint.

Did the fearless political editor stick by his story? Er, not quite. Instead he has sent a grovelling letter to Lilley explaining that the article was trying to draw a distinction between "the intellectual case for radical policies" presented by ministers such as Lilley and the "carping in the lobbies" by backbench nonentities. In short, he had intended to flatter the secretary of state, not to bury him.

"But clearly, in retrospect," Stephens adds, "I should have checked with you directly. My apologies. Thank you for setting out the position so clearly. I would be happy to seek to persuade the *FT* to give prominence to any future speech stating your strong support for the prime minister."

WHO is Britain's most hapless newspaper columnist? Step forward Woodrow Wyatt, of the *News of the Screws*.

Screws readers are used to Wyatt's assaults upon "ignorant" journalists. They have recently been told that ill-informed hacks tell "torrents of lies and abuse", are "so distant from fact that they destroy their own credibility" and "were exposed as buffoons when they told us John Major couldn't win the last election".

So which top columnist was the only one in Fleet Street to predict confidently that Major would win his Vat-on-fuel vote? Who told *Times* readers (1 Dec) that "enough whipless Tories will vote against Labour's VAT-trap to defeat it" and, even more certain, informed the *News of the World* (4 Dec) that "These Eurosceptic clowns will fail again next week to prevent the VAT on fuel increase"?

None other than Lord Wyatt of Pisspoor!

THE *Spectator*'s William Cash is in further trouble: the Board of Deputies of British Jews has protested to his proprietor, Conrad Black, and demanded that the bumptious young hack be severely punished for his recent animadversions on the "Jewish cabal" in Hollywood.

While we await Black's considered judgement, it may be worth reminding him of an article by a *Sunday Times* hackette published in March this year about... Jews in Hollywood. Although it didn't create the same stir as Cash's recent effort, it was no less provocative.

"Given the predominance of Jews in the secondary ranks of art and showbiz," the author observed, "it is remarkable that they are relatively scarce in the primary ranks of great writers and artists. Considering all those hordes [*sic*] of Jews who must make up 30 per cent or more of actors, screenwriters, producers, directors, agents, acting coaches, business managers and impresarios, it seems strange that their representation in the front ranks of art drops to 2 or 3 per cent. Jews are often great cartoonists but more rarely great painters, often great scorers of movie music but rarely great composers."

She went on to explain that the subject had come to mind because an Oscar acceptance speech by one of the producers of *Schindler's List* had urged us to remember the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. "I yield to nobody in my admiration for the survivors of the Holocaust," she wrote, "but I found his words irritating."

And who was the author of this inflammatory stuff? Step forward Barbara Amiel, aka Mrs Conrad Black.

UNDETERRED by the fuss about Richard Gott's Moscow connections, the *Independent* has appointed yet another ex-Communist to a senior position.

Dave Aaronovitch, who is joining the *Indie* as chief leader-writer, will find himself among friends. Martin Jacques, who is charge of political features at the paper, used to edit *Marxism Today* — in which capacity, as former CP apparatchik Reuben Falber revealed two years ago, he was paid with money sent over from Moscow. Jacques's sidekick at the *Indie*, Charlie Leadbeater, is another former contributor to *Marxism Today*.

Meanwhile, those *Indie* hacks with a record of anti-Communism are having a rather harder time. Julian Nundy, a friend of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, spent many years exposing the misdeeds of the Soviet Union; more recently, he has been based in Paris, first for Reuter's and now for the *Indie*. But last week he was abruptly sacked and told to clear his desk by the end of the month.

What was his offence? In September, Nundy was ordered by new editor Ian Hargreaves to make French politics his "top priority". Two weeks later, however, Hargreaves was complaining that his coverage included "too much politics". When he finally got his marching orders last week, the hapless Nundy was told that "we need a correspondent in Paris who is more profound." Will the *Indie* now be offering the job to Sir Isaiah Berlin, perhaps?

IT'S THE moment you've all been waiting for... the results of the *Sun*'s greatest ever competition — to win £50,000 a year for life!

Readers will recall how the *Eye* poured scorn on the benevolent rag's contest. Surely, we said, the inclusion of an entrant's age on the competition form will influence their success. Surely an octogenarian will pick up the prize rather than a robust 20-year-old with years to live?

And how wrong we were... The winners weren't doddery 80 year olds at all — they were a healthy couple aged 70 and 75. And the beaming pensioners, Patrick and Elsie Simmonds, were pictured in the *Sun* with their winning entry and their bemused great-grandson perched between them.

The winning entries were picked by a black and white lemur in a zoo, so there could be no suggestion of the older entries wriggling their way to the top of the pile... could there?

THE fearless *Daily Mail* has a long and glorious tradition of escorting redundant employees off the premises. This is to reduce the risk of the disaffected sabotaging computer systems or running off with exclusives from the snoozedesk.

When three AppleMac operators were made redundant recently, they were prepared for the normal procedure. Two of them, both middleaged men, were escorted out by their head of department with a slap on the back and a shake of the hand.

But the third didn't receive quite such a gracious farewell. Instead, five security men showed him the door; and staff were horrified to see him being thrown out like a criminal. What was the difference between this employee and the other two? Why, he was a six foot Nigerian in his mid-twenties.

Private I-I-I!

THIS week's round-up of the nation's most egocentric columnists (based on the number of incidences of the word "I" in a single piece).

1	Bernard Levin (Times 2/12)	**56**
2=	Zoë Heller (Independent on Sunday 11/12)	**38**
2=	Ruth Dudley Edwards (Independent 3/12)	**38**
4	Suzanne Moore (Guardian 8/12)	**37**
5	Esther Rantzen (Daily Express 5/12) . . .	**32**
6=	Zoë Heller (Independent on Sunday 4/12)	**31**
6=	Victoria Coren (Daily Telegraph 29/11) . .	**31**
6=	Joan Smith (Guardian 10/12)	**31**
9	Sue Arnold (Observer 11/12)	**27**
10	Melanie McDonagh (Standard 29/11) . .	**25**

Bubblin' under: Mariella Frostrup, John Diamond, Peter McLie, Francis Wheen.

(Thanks to B. Douglas)

AT LONG last Nigel Pratt-Dumpster had a scoop last week: he revealed that *Sunday Times* TV critic A.A. Gill had left his wife and shacked up with "leggy model Nicola Formby, 29".

But the news cannot have come as much of a surprise to the deserted Mrs Gill, or to the handful of people who actually plough through Gill's hundreds of *Sunday Times* columns. They have long betrayed an unhealthy fascination with the leggy Nicola.

On 3 July, for instance, he mentioned that he had been escorted to a preview screening by "a nice girl called Nicola Formby" who had once played Princess Di in an American mini-series. "In fact, she looks very like the Princess of Wales's prettier sister," he drooled.

Two weeks later he inserted another gratuitous reference to la Formby, this time recalling her days as a weather-girl. "Nicola has many skills and natural attributes, but a passing knowledge of meteorology isn't one of them." Nevertheless, she was "a little ray of sunshine".

Her skills and attributes were rather more clearly defined on 10 July, when Gill wrote a leering feature for the Style section about how Formby had had a bronze cast made of her breasts by sculptor Kate Braine. The piece was illustrated by no fewer than two photos of the embonpoint in question, for which Gill was full of admiration. Oddly enough, in the same article he mentioned that his wife had commissioned a similar bronze of her own breasts and given it to Gill as a birthday present. Clearly, however, she simply couldn't compete with the bosomy ex-weather girl and Princess Di lookalike.

CONGRATULATIONS to the famous editor of the *News of the World*, Piers Morgan, who has struck a blow for the rights of the famous to a little privacy.

Piers has decided to abandon his customary stance against hypocrisy. This, he used to say in interviews, is the one thing he cannot abide and it is the vice that drives him to publish such nasty things about other people's private lives.

Piers has now hit problems of his own and has separated from his wife. He is keen, however, for this to be a private matter and he can be assured that all those he has written about in the past wish him every success.

DEGRADATION THAT SHAMES THE NHS screamed a *Daily Mail* headline last month over a two-page shock-horror feature about unisex wards in hospitals. It was illustrated by a huge photo of patients in a mixed ward.

"It can come as something of a shock to patients, particularly women, to find themselves lying in a ward next to someone of the opposite sex," the caption revealed.

It can come as an even greater shock for patients to find themselves appearing in the *Daily Mail* almost three decades after the event: for the photo in last month's *Mail* was in fact taken *28 years ago* at St Peter's Hospital, Chertsey — to go with an article in the newspaper *praising* mixed wards.

As the headline on the 1966 story implied ("IN THE HOSPITAL WHERE TOGETHERNESS IS A TONIC THE PATIENTS ARE FEELING BETTER ALREADY"), the patients in the picture were not in the least shocked to find themselves on a unisex ward — they were delighted. But the family of at least one old man in the picture was none too pleased to see it being used again now in a different context: not least because he died some years ago.

PORNOGRAPHY

THE *Daily Express* is not noted for its campaigning journalism, so readers will have been surprised to see five pages over three successive days devoted to the same story recently.

First came "The Porn Brokers, day one of an investigation into the real victims of a dirty business", complete with two large pics of woman in flimsy black lingerie.

Next the *Express* turned its gaze on "the barons making huge profits from sleaze" and focused on "seedy empires built on dirty money" (accompanied, purely to illustrate the nature of the problem, by photos of nine scantily dressed young women) with the emphasis on the activities of Paul Raymond, Ron Davey and Richard Desmond.

The latter came in for particular scrutiny, with his picture captioned "market leader," and the text explaining that "he lives in a London mansion near Hampstead Heath, drives a Bentley, sports a fat cigar and has rubbed shoulders with the Duke of Edinburgh". But, the paper warned its readers, despite the shoulder rubbing "just under the veneer of respectability is a story of women being exploited and degraded. In the second part of the most comprehensive investigation into the porn brokers, we look at those behind the lucrative empires".

Strangely space was not found to ponder why ads for Desmond's magazines were, until recently, found tucked away on the sports pages of all the *Express* titles. The reason for this shameless promotion of publications whose pages contain, according to the *Express*, "ads for graphic telephone sex and brutal, hard core videos which are far from glamorous", was perfectly simple. United Newspapers (prop: Lord Stevens of Ludgate), had signed a distribution deal with Northern and Shell (prop: Richard Desmond). This saw a full range of Desmond's titles distributed along with, er, Lord Stevens' — including the *Daily Express*.

According to the *Express* again, Desmond "had explored almost every niche in the porn market. He publishes fat women without their clothes in *Big and Fat*, older women without clothes in *Forty Plus*, and women dressed in rubber and PVC in *Eros*"... "He is especially keen on race and sex, with *Black And Blue* ('Packed full of bra-busting' black babes') as well as *Asian Babes* ('Eastern cuties show the lot!')"

Shocking stuff, obviously — and all of it available courtesy of Lord Stevens' distribution system until very recently. Alas, Stevens and Desmond fell out and m'learned friends are even now discussing the nature of their disagreement. Sadly there wasn't space to mention this either on any of the five full pages the *Express* devoted to its "shocking series on the sex industry".

CYCLING

Leeds City Council is committing almost £1 over the next five years to Britain's only world-ranked one-day race. The three-year-old Leeds Classic rates with the long-established European races in the World Cup series.

Independent

HALLO!

THE HEARTWARMING COLUMN

HALLO! *TO Alexandra Palace and the fiesta of the decade to celebrate the first 10 years in politics of the Marquesa's compatriot, Michael "Miguel" Portillo.*

The general would have loved it — we spend an evening in the company of likeminded aficianados of law and order! — though he might have balked at the food: instead of Rioja and tapas we are served salmon and fillet of beef; and Miguel shows what a generous fellow he is by laying on a cash bar.

Sadly the evening is spoilt when my companion returns from the "gentlemen's" with disturbing news. As well as a number of partygoers being sick, he spies two other Portillo loyalists who, for some bizarre reason, have tightly-rolled £20 pound notes up their noses!

"This worship of money has gone too far!" snorts our chaperone, returning to the table. Nonsense, we reply: they were probably only powdering their noses.

HALLO! WHATEVER happened to my dear young friend Jason Donovan, the former teenage heartthrob who left the pop world two years ago to embark on a career as a straight actor?

In the *Sunday Times* recently the virile songster — whose newly-cropped hair leaves no doubt as to his manliness — revealed: "I don't get up now and blow wave my hair. I don't want to f***** look at myself anymore."

This foul-mouthed Jason Donovan is clearly unrelated to the *other* Jason Donovan who sued *The Face* for libel in April 1992. For *that* Jason gave evidence on oath that he was a "decent" person who had been "disgusted" and "appalled" and "shocked" when he saw the filthy word "fuck" in *The Face*. The squeaky-clean hunk left the high court in no doubt whatsoever as to where he stood on the subject of foul language.

The *Sunday Times* must surely have confused my friend and that other frightful "Jason".

HALLO! TO THE merriest Christmas party of all — at the Irish embassy — where the Marquesa spies the normally crisp Virginia Bottomley in something of a panic.

Only hours before the government's famous VAT defeat in the Commons, poor Ginny witnesses a foul verbal and physical assault on an enchanting Irish lass. The yobbo responsible? None other than John Major's biographer, Bruce "Brute" Anderson.

As the gorgeous health secretary was chatting with the *Evening Standard*'s pert columnist Melanie McDonagh, a drunken "Brute" set upon the innocent Melanie in a fit of uncontrolled jealousy. "Potato head," snarled the unspeakable *Sunday Express* political hack. "You should be at home peeling potatoes, having had eight children, you thick Paddy."

Ginny, like any well-bred English gel, pretended nothing was happening and continued to chat charmingly with Melanie. Enraged, "Brute" then stabbed cocktail sticks into Melanie's shapely bottom. Ginny, unable to stand anymore, fled with a cry of: "I must rush to the Commons and vote for VAT!" Once out of earshot, Melanie slapped the talentless swine resoundingly.

HALLO! *NO SUCH japes for Virginia's long-suffering husband Peter, the former minister for bicycles who now hovers uncomfortably on the fringes of such parties.*

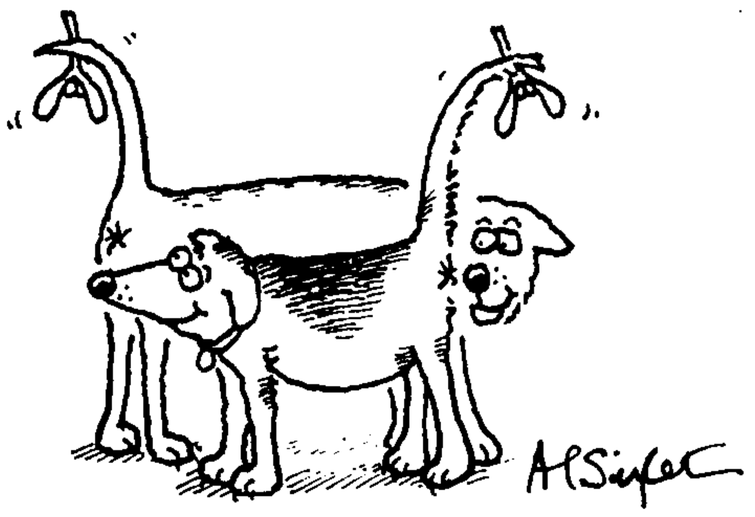
The Marquesa frequently feels tempted to take the waif back home, but at the Irish embassy do Virginia beat her to it. She eventually tracked Peter down before he could put on his clips and barked: "You'll have to come now, Peter, if you want a lift in my ministerial limo!"

HALLO! IS THERE no limit to the altruism of the Duchess of York? Not content with ministering to the needy on these shores, the fun-loving author and entrepreneur has set up a charity in New York: Chances for Children Inc.

Critics snipe that charity is the only way for a vulgar parvenue to break into New York society, but the Marquesa is happy to point out that Fergie has set up the "Chances" office on New York's terribly rundown Fifth Avenue. It is staffed by her former palace secretary, Christine Gallagher.

On a recent visit frugal Fergie set an example to disadvantaged children everywhere: she stayed at the exclusive Carlisle Hotel, flew about the United States in a private jet and had a stretch limo and armed guards in constant attendance. This was paid for by United States firms (like toy manufacturer FAO Schwarz) eager to cash in on (*Shurely "endorse"?*) Fergie's charity works.

Happily, Fergie has clinched a merchandising deal with FAO Schwarz for the brilliant Budgie the Helicopter series that she thought up all by herself. If Chances for Children is half as successful as Chances for Duchesses Inc, the needy children of the world can look forward to a happy Christmas indeed.



HALLO! TO THE George Inn, a watering-hole at London Bridge, for a tipple alongside the famous temperance enthusiast Sir Teddy Taylor, rebel Tory MP for Southend Barking.

Bemoaning the death of democracy in Britain, conversation turns to the European Union and Teddy asks a bemused reveller standing next to him: "Do you have any army experience?"

"No. Why d'you ask?" comes the reply.

"We need good army types to be ready if things are to change," says Taylor, a self-confessed Bob Marley fan.

Reveller: "What? To storm Westminster up the Thames?"

"Westminster? Well maybe," muses Taylor. "But we should really start off at Brussels..."

HALLO! *THE Marquesa's fave Christmas present this year is Tory whisky, promoted by the prime minister, no less, who is keen to raise cash for his party by appearing in the adverts as a liquor salesman. A bottle of "Premiers" costs just £36.50 with the portrait of any Tory PM you choose on the label. Dubbed "The Spirit of Leadership", it's being sold through Tory constituency branches as a fund raiser. The most popular label? John Major. Yes, the Tories are in the drink and sinking fast...*

The Marquesa

Spooks & Spookmen

IN JANUARY 1976, as he left London Broadcasting to join ITN as a new reporter, the young journalist Jon Snow got a letter at his north London home from a Mr D. Stilbury at room 055 at the Old War Office Building at the ministry of defence.

The letter started: "I think it just possible that you might be able to assist me with some confidential work I have in hand." He was invited to meet Mr Stilbury, and told to present himself at the side entrance of the Old War Office Building and "say you have an appointment at Room 055".

He was instructed not to tell anyone about the letter and to bring it with him by way of identification. Intrigued, Snow went to the appointed place, was ushered in to Room 055 and immediately ordered to sign the official secrets act.

"Mr Stilbury" told the young journalist that SIS — the secret security services — were interested in recruiting Snow to help them with certain matters. In the main, they wanted inside information about the political activities of other journalists, upon whom they hoped Mr Snow would keep a careful eye, reporting, whenever he thought it appropriate, to Mr Stilbury and his colleagues.

For this Mr Stilbury offered to "match" (ie double) Jon Snow's LBC salary — then £3,600 a year. The money, Snow was told, would be paid straight into his bank account and there would, Mr Stilbury emphasised, be "no problem" with the Inland Revenue. He would not have to declare the money, and he certainly would not have to pay tax on it.

When Snow expressed some doubt, he was told to go away and read the Denning Report on the Profumo affair — the "clearest published account of how we operate". He was assured the security services had no political allegiances. "We are as loyal to Tony Benn as we are to Callaghan," he was told.

He did not read the Denning Report, but he did read Kim Philby's *Secret War* which convinced him that he wanted nothing to do with the shadowy world of journalists who worked for the security services, as Philby did. When he returned to Room 055 with his decision, Mr Stilbury was very cross indeed, pointing out to the young journalist how much hard work the security services had put in to this recruitment. Snow was told, to his enormous relief, never to contact the security services again.

The Snow story provides a suitable background to the hullabaloo about Richard Gott and the couple of trips he took 20 years ago at the expense of the Russian secret service. The probability is that every main newspaper office and every main television station employs at least one highly-paid agent of the security services whose chief job is to spy on his/her colleagues.

Information is stored away and used only when it is necessary. Thus Gott himself was told by MI6 in 1989 that it had information about his tenuous links with the KGB. When Gott insisted he had not had a penny from the Russians, the special branch man who was standing in for MI6 at the time assured him that was quite possible. The Russian controllers, he said, systematically lied about payments — pretending they had paid informants and pocketing the money themselves.

Gott asked the special branch man if his editor at the *Guardian* should be informed. "No," said the spook. "Keep it to yourself." No doubt a time would come when the information could be usefully fielded. It came five years later... when for the first time in its history the *Guardian* became a real nuisance to the British establishment.

The hounding of Jonathan Aitken, who has very close links with the intelligence services, and the damage done to the government over the sleaze revelations, had to be dealt with in the time-honoured tradition of the security services: by smear. The young Thatcherite hawks at the *Spectator*, whose home affairs editor Alasdair Palmer boasts of his association with that most amenable of spy academics, Christopher Andrew, was an obvious receptacle for recycled MI6 garbage. The *Spectator*'s editor proved his assurance that the "Gott scoop" had nothing to do with Aitken by choosing as his cover illustration for the story three "rag-outs" from the, er, *Guardian* Aitken revelations.

As so often with the intelligence services, one good story led to another. First, the story was that Gott was rather a useless agent, who didn't give the KGB any useful information. By Sunday as the spook writers in the Sunday papers got to work, he had become invaluable to the enemy.

The KGB has been disbanded. It can do no damage to anyone. Its only real purpose is to feed the hungry fantasies of the countless British journalists who were made the same sort of offer as that made to Jon Snow, but, unlike him, accepted it.

RAIL NEWS

FOR THE first time in living memory the Georgian Central Station in Newcastle-upon-Tyne has been denuded of its enormous Christmas tree.

North-easterners have been deprived because of a tiff between Railtrack, now the owners of the station, and Intercity East Coast, who run the trains. Both said it was the other's job to pay for the tree and its assembly.

In the end a station supervisor paid for a small tree out of his own pocket. But despite his philanthropy, it looks lost in the huge station concourse and is heavily camouflaged beneath the enormous decorations and lights of the previous 25ft tree.

It is to be hoped that this seasonal ill-will is quickly derailed. Petty disputes could become serious if the argument is over who pays for upkeep of the coloured lights that tell the trains when to stop and go.

PETE WATERMAN, the pop-to-train-spotting magnate, is busy demonstrating how rail privatisation will cut consumer choice, despite government predictions.

The first train-operating section of BR to be franchised to a private company will be the special trains unit. It passes into Waterman's hands in April. The business, which lays on special excursions, from luxury land cruises and nostalgic steam trips to trains exclusive to anorak wearers, has a turnover of about £8 million.

People who organise rail tours have traditionally chosen from a variety of train operators, but that is now to end with the "opening up of the railways to free-market competition". Organisers are being told that from April *all* rail tours have to be operated by Waterman Railways.

As a sweetener the government agreed to assign Waterman the lion's share of contracts with no risk of competition at the outset. But now he wants — and appears to be getting — a monopoly of the market in an attempt to make a profit out of a business that was making a loss even before the advent of Railtrack's sky-high track access charges.

Similar concessions will no doubt have to be made before other companies can be bribed into taking on further franchises.

PRIVATISATION continues its headlong rush to the buffers with the news that one Railtrack service is now running six months late.

That is how long passengers — sorry, customers — have been waiting for the company to mend the electronic information board at the busy Leeds City Station.

Railtrack said it was waiting for a spare part; but as passengers and railway workers well know, the board was never out of action for more than two days before the rail system was split up for privatisation in April.

ENERGY

SO MUCH for environmental protection after privatisation of the electricity supply industry...

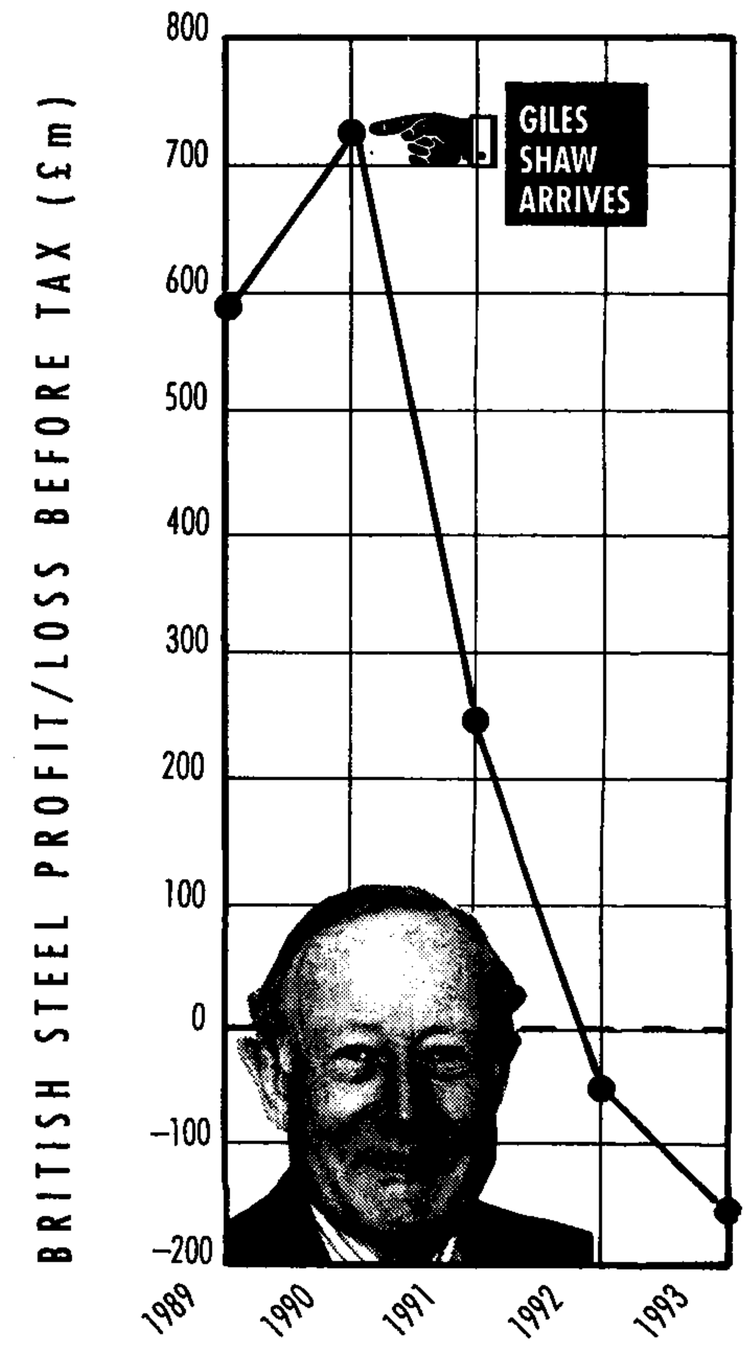
When National Power installed two de-sulphurisation units at the Drax power station in west Yorkshire earlier this year, they were heralded as part of a £700 million plan to be extended to the coal-fired station's remaining four units. Acid rain would be cut by removing 90 percent of Drax's sulphur dioxide emissions.

However, National Power has just revealed that it closes down the two clean units when demand for electricity is low between May and October — because the electricity from its four dirty units is cheaper to produce!

According to shamefaced Drax manager Mike Grasby, using the clean units makes the station's electricity dearer than that from other suppliers who have not installed de-sulphurisation equipment. So environmental protection and the free market are incompatible. Surprise, surprise.

British Management Part 7.

SIR GILES SHAW, (part-time) MP, Treasurer 1922 Committee, former Minister of State for Industry. Director British Steel since 1990.



British Steel plc Operating Profit/Loss before tax
1989 £593m. 1990 £733m. 1991 £254m.
1992 – £55m. 1993 – £149m.

IN THE TEAROOM

THE government's loss of its technical majority, its defeat on VAT on fuel and Labour's record lead in the polls should have brought a smile to the face of even the most dour member of the Campaign group of Labour MPs. So why the sullen resentment at the bread and dripping end of the tearoom?

Tory disarray and the albeit slim possibility of a snap election have given Tony Blair the excuse he needs to speed up the ditching of clause four. The leadership says it cannot wait until the party conference in October: it wants a special conference in the spring to settle the matter. Conveniently this would take place before the unions hold their own gathering to mandate their delegates. Many union members, Blair has been warned by their leaders, maintain a "sentimental attachment" to the wretched clause.

Blair also wants to speed up the selection of candidates, having every one in place by next summer — though some of those close to the boss wouldn't be too upset if that weren't possible. "In many ways the ideal candidate would be someone who only joined the party once we'd dumped clause four," said one New Labour stalwart, teasing a knot of gloomy left-wingers. "At least then we'd be sure he or she subscribed to our core aims and values."

It's beginning to dawn on Labour's left that the strategy of keeping quiet until the election and then springing a more radical agenda on a surprised Britain isn't going to work. The next generation of Labour MPs will be overwhelmingly Blairite, and the left will constitute only a troublesome rump that, as the Tories have shown, can always have the whip taken away. Their only hope is a small majority — so in a week where there have been plenty of causes for tearoom celebration, they've been snarling into their sticky buns. *'Urquhart'*

DAVID Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, has vehemently defended Tony Blair's decision to send his son to an opted-out, grant-maintained school outside his Islington catchment area.

While Labour backbenchers may have been surprised, voters in Blunkett's Sheffield constituency will have been astonished if they had read an article in their local paper. For only a few weeks before, there were told how their MP "attacked left-talking parents who failed to back their own local school" by sending their kids elsewhere.

Either Blunkett underwent a deep ideological change in the space of a fortnight or — heaven forbid — he is being politically expedient. The only other explanation, of course, is that he does not include Tony and Cherie Blair among "left-talking parents".

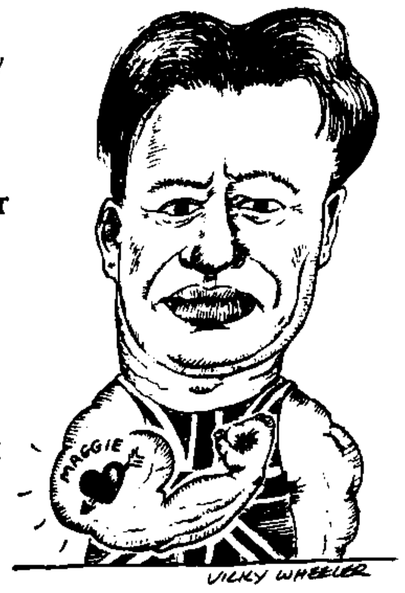
AMONG the heaps of junk mail now being sent to members of Tony Blair's New Labour party is an offer from Cornhill Insurance.

Party members and their partners are offered insurance against death or injury by accident "regardless of your occupation or state of health". The first £1,000 cover is free (and pretty well useless, of course); the rest of the premiums are very much par for the course.

There's one problem for the five million trade union members, however: you don't get cover if the accidental death or injury "is due to active participation in any strike".

EMPLOYMENT secretary Michael Portillo proved his credentials as a great constituency MP on a recent visit to his local family health authority.

Portillo was giving a lift to energy secretary Tim Eggar and local Edmonton MP Ian Twinn to a luncheon held in their honour. As they approached the FHA building in Cockfosters, Portillo phoned ahead to reception to ask the surprised receptionist how to find the building as he had got lost en route.



The former minister for transport can be forgiven for not knowing every street in his constituency. But Portillo couldn't find his way from his surgery to the FHA building — a distance of barely a quarter of a mile. Perhaps he studied map-reading with fellow old Harrovian Mark Thatcher.

WHENEVER more bad news emerges about the affairs of Robert Maxwell, government whips tend to raise a cheer and remind everyone that Maxwell was once a Labour MP.

There was no noticeable celebration from that quarter, however, when it was announced that a subsidiary of Morgan Grenfell merchant bank has been fined £180,000 by the regulator IMRO — the third largest such fine ever imposed.

The bank had "inadvertently" and without permission from the trustees shifted a few hundred thousand pounds worth of assets from a pension fund once owned by Maxwell. This happened in February 1989, not long after Morgan Grenfell recruited to its team the bright young Tory MP for Berkshire East, Andrew MacKay.

In a glowing tribute, circulated in 1988 to all staff, Morgan Grenfell director David Douglas Home said it was "no small credit" to the MP that "we have recovered our political acceptability in Westminster and Whitehall". The tribute went on: "Many companies underestimate how much their MP can do for them... I think we all ought to give some thought and discuss with our clients how Andrew can assist us."

Helpfully, Mr MacKay visited the bank's head

"Our gamble paid off — he didn't put VAT on cats!"

office every month. And he went on assisting (and being paid by) Morgan Grenfell until the general election, after which he was promoted to the whips' office, where he is now junior whip.

THE ministry of defence is going ahead with a £250 million office automation computer system even though nobody wants it.

The long-delayed purpose-designed CHOTS system now looks so obsolete staff are demanding — and getting — a standard personal computer (which also plays games) alongside the MoD specified system (which doesn't).

The MoD insists on delivering the machines, which were specially designed by ICL, because they provide a strategic electronic mail system. But with CHOTS machines being used as doorstops, email lies around unread for weeks.

AUSTIN MITCHELL, Labour MP for Great Grimsby, has put down an interesting amendment to an early-day motion proposed by his colleagues.

The motion on cot deaths triggered by the *Cook Report* was inaccurate in several respects, according to Mitchell. Not least was its intimation that the scientist Barry Richardson was the first person to advise parents to sleep babies on their backs.

In fact, he said, the government changed its mind on putting babies on their fronts "after the *This Week* programme fronted by Anne Diamond revealed how New Zealand had drastically reduced cot deaths by laying babies on their backs".

This important and admirable insistence on the correct source of facts has nothing to do with Mr Mitchell's wife, one Linda McDougall, who is a television producer... on *This Week*.

THE Tories have unveiled their latest bright idea for preventing computer cock-ups: the Private Funding Initiative (PFI), which has proved itself by bringing expensive projects in on time and on budget — projects like the, er, Channel tunnel rail link.

One side effect of this complex scheme is that payments to consultants' remain hidden from ministers and scrutiny by the public accounts committee. Not surprisingly, the warmest welcome has come from... the consultants.

Following disasters at the social security department (see *Eye* 860), Andersen Consulting has suggested PFI should be applied to the DSS's next project: the huge national insurance system, NIRS2. The DSS has commissioned an "independent" report giving it the green light. The report was written by Andersen Consulting; and the consultants have just opened a new 300-staff data centre in Newcastle in anticipation of the award.

However, there are signs that Andersen is becoming wary of the curse of the Gnome. In a premature celebration of the NIRS2 award, the company threw a party with free food and drinks for DSS staff at St James Park, home of Newcastle United FC. To avoid scrutiny of the "hospitality book", in which civil servants must declare approaches from strangers bearing gifts, Andersen charged them all £5 a head.

'Backbiter'

TV

The Christmas Schedules
(All channels)

THERE was recently a fuss in the papers about the infant school where John Lennon's song "And so this is Christmas" had been changed to "And so this is December" in order not to offend those not of the Christian faith.

Yet although the medium is usually keen not to offend anyone, on television, Christmas remains Christmas, having somehow avoided becoming December Break or Winter Holiday. Admittedly the BBC's press information — referring to Christmas Eve as "a special night which celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ" — manages to make it sound just like another themed anniversary night.

But — in a trend to gladden the hearts of clerics — Christmas on TV has actually obeyed their sermons by becoming *less* commercial in recent years. Advertisers are reluctant to advertise heavily when the shops are closed, and so ITV now scarcely bothers to compete on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

On Christmas Eve — which is actually a Saturday, usually the most competitive scheduling night — ITV is showing the indifferent eight-year-old Goldie Hawn movie *Wildcats*. On Christmas Day, its peak-time movies are 30 and 35 years old respectively, although the former is the perennial *Mary Poppins* and the latter is the telly premiere of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*. Even so — as ITV also offers the 29-year-old *For A Few Dollars More* on Boxing Day — it is clear that the Network Centre is keeping its big movie blockbusters for use at more lucrative times of the year.

Outside the cinema buy-ins, the commercial boys show a similar lack of energy. There is a special edition of one of the network's two big drama hits — *Christmas Heartbreak* on Christmas Day — but, sadly, no seasonal spin-off for the series whose title makes it the perfect candidate for such treatment. How could Robbie Coltrane forego the possibility of a *Christmas Cracker*? Instead, we get a rather desperate-sounding US import, *Robin Williams In The Wild With Dolphins*, in which, apparently, "the comic actor embarks on a fascinating tropical quest to learn more about the legendary intelligence of dolphins".

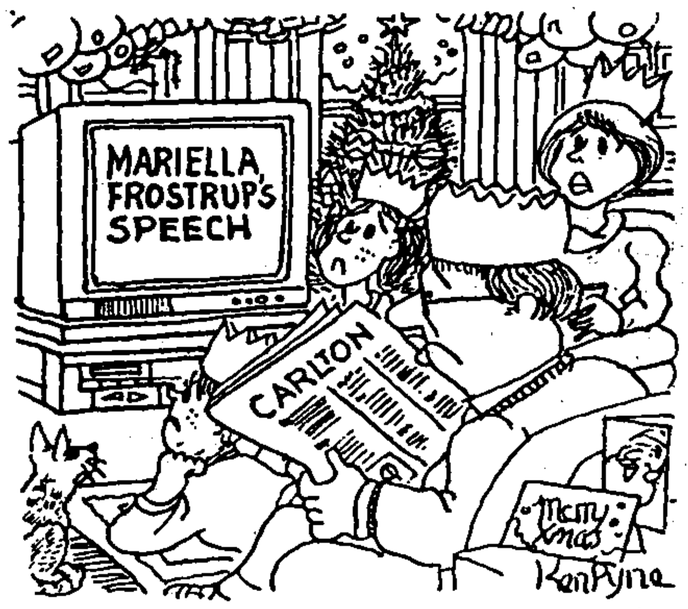
BBC1, by contrast, runs on Christmas Day a five-hour sequence of Yentob's bankers, beginning with *EastEnders*, then taking the premiere of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, a Christmas special of *One Foot In The Grave* and a new Victoria Wood stand-up show, with the old *Morecambe & Wise Show* starring Glenda Jackson to round the night off. Christmas Eve has specials of *Casualty* and *Birds of a Feather*. Boxing Night uses up two more film premieres: Schwarzenegger in *Kindergarten Kop* and *The Addams Family*.

With Yentob so short of attractions throughout the year, BBC1 is clearly going to have to examine the rationale of using up so many assets in a period when ITV is not really trying. Admittedly the likely ratings victory will jack up audience shares for December and allow the corporation to put out a rare BBC-whacks-ITV press release just after Christmas; but in the long months ahead the controller might suddenly find himself in desperate need of a Victoria Wood special or a Costner or Schwarzenegger film.

With his characteristic post-modern irony, Michael Jackson over at BBC2 has chosen to make Christmas — one of the few natural "theme weeks" in the calendar — one of the few periods in his schedules to have no theme. In a spirit of a bit of this and a bit of that, he throws in on Christmas Day a little kitsch — *The Carpenters at the BBC*, featuring Karen and David in a 1971 concert — and a bit of culture — a recording of *Aida* — plus a middling movie — Demi Moore in *The Butcher's Wife* — and a little business-as-normal, with the start of a new series on magic, called *Siren Spirits*.

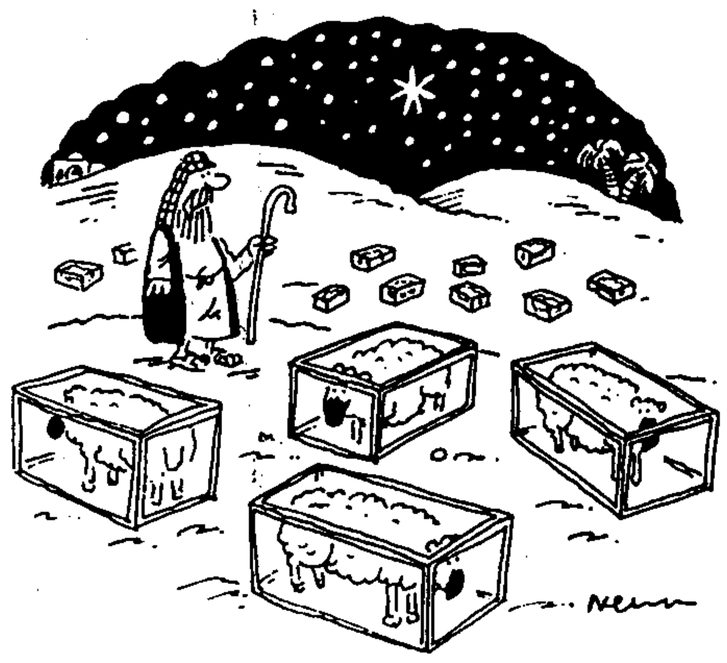
Channel 4 — which likes to present alternative Yule — made a fool of itself last year with a gay Christmas, which it offered as an "antidote" to the traditional families celebrations. By so doing it managed to imply that Christmas was a specifically heterosexual festival and that gay people were saddies who didn't have families. There was also a sneaking suspicion that the entire season was a vehicle for one pun; the alternative Queen's (ho, ho) Speech, presented by Quentin Crisp.

This theory is confirmed by the fact that this year's alternative



season also seems devoid of logic except a play on words. C4 has put together "Black Christmas", an Afro-Caribbean extravaganza. Is Christmas a specifically white festival? Do black people not celebrate it? Channel 4 doesn't care. They like the title. The house punster is said to be working on two more alternative festivals. At Easter, Channel 4 will screen Wester, a series of films about the Wild West, the West Country and Fred West. And, when other stations unveil their summer seasons, the fourth channel will present Some Aren't, a series about outsiders.

'Square Eyes'



MEDIA NEWS

SENIOR staff in BBC Radio are hoping that the Queen Mother doesn't peg out in the next few weeks.

While BBC Television is fully prepared for the royal demise, radio bosses are engaged in a most unseemly tug-of-war over the old girl. Michael Green, controller of Radio 4, and Jenny Abramsky, head of Radio 5 Live, simply cannot agree on who should host the programme when the channels come together to break the news to an appalled public — should it be someone like James Naughtie or Sue MacGregor from R4 (as Green insists), or one of R5L's clueless presenters such as Sybil Ruscoe?

Jonathan Baker, executive editor of Radio News, was recently asked to try to arbitrate between the two squabbling supremos, but in a memo to colleagues he has now admitted defeat. "Some of you have expressed concern and bewilderment about our apparent lack of preparedness if the worst should happen," he writes. "I understand and share this." Until new "Royal Death Guidelines" can be agreed, however, "the process is stuck".

"I am fully aware that this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs," Baker concludes, "and that many duty editors feel very vulnerable. I am as uneasy and frustrated as you are. But for now, we have no choice but to wait for clearance from on high."

A MEMO to BBC TV producers by the head of documentaries, Paul Hamann, gives a revealing insight into the direction of BBC1 under its "upmarket" controller, Alan Yentob.

"Alan Yentob feels that he is still not getting enough *single* popular documentary ideas for BBC1 pitched to him from all departments," Hamann reveals.

"In one week recently there were two popular documentaries which he appeared to quite like — *And God Created Bardot* and *Botham*. Whether we perceive these sort of films to be good or not is pretty academic. What he clearly wants is more ideas like those and last week's *Wax Meets Madonna*. Could all suggestions from any of you come directly to me please."

In Bed With David Mellor, perhaps?

TRIAL
MICHAEL JACKSON, YOU ARE, ARE YOU NOT, CONTROLLER OF BBC2?
I AM
AND THAT YOU CLAIMED TO HAVE PUT ON THE TRIAL IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST...
AND IT IS THE FINDINGS OF THIS COURT...
THAT THERE ISN'T MUCH
RATINGS
Ken Pyne

AFTER I-BSkyB comes a new game: spotting blatant puffs for Lord Rothermere's TV interests in his in-house journals (*Daily Mail*, London *Evening Standard* etc).

Peter Paterson, TV "critic" of the *Daily Mail*, has gallantly got the ball rolling by praising the marvellous new "Channel One" — a kind of pisspoor Camcorder News Network for London. Not for the whole of the capital: so far it's just for the 350,000 Londoners connected to cable systems that have agreed to take Rothermere's latest expansion into the brave new world of multi-meejah. But it's early days.

As Rupurt Murdoch once said, a monopoly is a terrible thing... until you have one. Should the proprietor of the *Evening Standard* be allowed to try to become the dominant supplier of the capital's local news? Will anyone try to stop him? Watch this waste of space...

RUPERT MURDOCH is bad for your health... particularly if you live in India.

Murdoch is now beaming wall-to-wall crap at the sub-continent from his News Corporation-owned satellite. And a recent Friday night check on the Star Plus satellite TV service (63 percent stake: R. Murdoch) revealed the following exciting schedule: *Aerobics Oz Style* (thrice); *Neighbours*, *Santa Barbara*, *The Sullivans*, and *Bold and Beautiful* all twice; and one each of *Dangermouse*, *Donahue*, *Oprah Winfrey*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Batman*, *G.I. Joe*, *Remington Steele*, *Dynasty* and *Riviera*.

As well as bizarre scheduling, the programmers clearly do not know which language to broadcast in. Last month in the state of Karnataka, which includes the three major cities of Bangalore, Mangalore and Mysore, a proposal to broadcast TV in Urdu saw the local population taking to the streets to protest. Seventeen people died in the resulting riot.

Simple research would have revealed that only 5 percent of the population of Karnataka speak Urdu as a first language and 60 percent speak Kannada as a first language followed by Hindi.

BIRTSPEAK

AT the customer interface in an increasingly dynamic, er, international business environment, BBC Worldwide needs all the help it can get to flog BBC programmes abroad. Instead, it has got Project Springboard.

"Q: What is Project Springboard?

"A: It is a concentrated 14 week project designed to find ways to increase our sales productivity and reduce the costs of sales support activity. It is followed by an implementation period of 12 to 18 months with some ideas put in place quickly in March, and others requiring more time to action."

And will it help cut the time, and hence the cost, of sales support activity? Simple:

"PROCESS

"At the end of each day, we would like you to record how much time you have spent (to the nearest ¼ hour) engaged in certain 'end products' in support of particular 'activities'. For example, if you spent 1½ hours in an internal meeting talking about your latest account forecasts, you would find the box where the column 'Account planning: updating/revising' and the row 'Internal meetings' intersect, and enter 1½. An example completed form is attached.

"You will probably find it helpful to keep a running total of your time allocation as you go through the day.

"Once this form is completed you should give/fax it to your Unit Leader by 9.00am the following morning so he can collate the results. You should also speak to your Unit Leader if you have any queries about how to fill the form in."

LUVVIES

I find him an intriguing mixture of ancient and modern. There's a sort of Hapsburgian gravity to him. It's there, in his eyes mostly, this sort of ancient Austrian quality. And yet he's so modern.

EMMA THOMPSON
(on Arnold Schwarzenegger)
Daily Express

Submitted by I.C. Porter.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"I bring you good tidings, followed by regular tidings updates and on-the-hour bulletins, also a tidings phone-in, and Good Morning Tidings with Anne and Nick..."

POP EYE

BACK in August sound engineer Tim Warhurst broke his neck after falling 10 feet from a stack of speakers at London's Docklands Arena.

Mr Warhurst, one of the sound crew for alleged teen heartthrobs Take That, went into a coma and was transferred to an intensive care unit. The next day the *Sun*'s Andy Coulson, who has done so much to promote Take That despite the evidence of their limited talent, reported the band's grief and how they were keeping in constant touch with the hospital.

This came as news to Mr Warhurst's family, who had no contact with Take That after his admission to the hospital, where he died a month later without having regained consciousness.

Last Friday an inquest was held. Coroner Dr Douglas Chambers described the lack of safety harnesses for the backstage crew at the concert as "entirely unsatisfactory" and said Mr Warhurst's fall could have been prevented. A verdict of accidental death was recorded, and afterwards Mr Warhurst's family said that they had still received no message of sympathy or offer of help from Take That, their management or record company.

Strangely, unlike other newspapers, last Saturday's *Sun* failed to mention any of this. It did, however, carry a large ad for its sister title, the *News of the World*, which was offering a free Take That album as part of a continuing promotion on its centre pages the following day. Funny that.

TV MASTERCLASS
No 94 *Between the Lines (BBC1)*

SUCCESSFUL programmes are a pain. You get asked to do another series; then another one after that; you get in-depth write-ups in the papers; and before you know where you are you're up for a Bafta. Boor-ring!

But help is at hand for programme makers who are tired of success. The present series of *Between the Lines*, currently limping to a close, demonstrates a six-point plan for destroying a winning formula.

Rule 1: Change of set-up Boring old successful *Between the Lines — BTL1* — was set in the murkier recesses of the police force, primarily the complaints investigation board. This made a good, believable setting for corruption, brutality and office politics. The all-new dismal *Between the Lines — BTL2* — reunites Clark with "the old firm" of Harry Naylor and Maureen O'Connell (who were kicked out of the police force at the same time as he was, coincidentally enough) but in the "private sector". This means working as bodyguards, as private investigators and in, er, hotel security: which means a new, unfamiliar, un-convincing setting every week. Which leads on to...

Rule 2: Destroy continuity *BTL1*'s plotting was something to behold: most episodes interwove a plot of their own with plot strands set up earlier in the series. No such luxuries for *BTL2*: instead, we get a brand new plot in every episode, and each plot gets nicely wrapped up inside 40 minutes. As well as making the series less interesting in itself, this rules out the kind of political comment which was implicit in *BTL1*'s complex and subtle scenarios. Which, given the series' reputation for being "political", leads to...

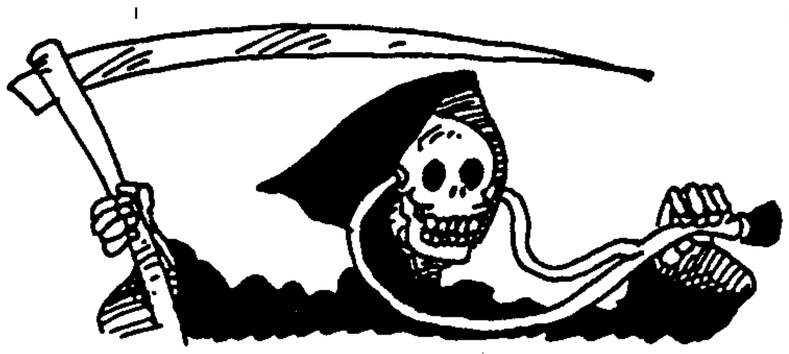
Rule 3: Tackle Issues *BTL1* was about the police: not arms dealers, not vivisectionists, just the police. It seemed to work. *BTL2*, so far, has been about uranium smuggling and the tabloid press and animal rights and South American dictatorships and the IRA — and it's all over the place, in other words. Moreover, as there isn't enough time to go into anything in detail, the *ishoos* are rendered in the most basic form.

Rules 4 and 5: Bigger bangs and **More paranoia** The appearance in *BTL2* of an adviser's credit for Gerry Gable must have aroused expectations among fans of the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, which Gable edits: telling details, political realism, subtlety? Sadly, Gable's arrival appears to have coincided with a nosedive into paranoia and sensationalism. *BTL2* displays what can only be called a passion for violence: "Let's have more punch-ups. Let's have guns. Let's have bombs". Presumably on the basis that we needed a change from the sight of Tony Clark with a bloody nose, we were recently presented with Harry Naylor with a time-bomb attached to his tie — *Goldfinger* it wasn't.

It's axiomatic in *BTL2* that nobody is what they seem: everyone is either working for the government, being manipulated by the government or — preferably — both. *BTL2* shows a particular fascination with radical groups, which are shown to be composed of a well-meaning fringe of supporters, a hard core of mindless fanatics and a single evil mastermind; the latter is, of course, working for somebody else. The result is some confused and claustrophobic plotting and long passages of exposition disguised as dialogue: "So it wasn't the left trying to make it look like it was the right — it was M15 trying to make it *look* like it was the left trying to make it look like it was the right! I see!"

Rule 6: Change the characters Tony Clark used to be a bright lad, but his brain appears to have collapsed under the complexities of *BTL2*. His role now consists largely of being pushed from one perilous and *ishoo*-laden situation to another, ricocheting between his old adversary Deakin (who has also left the police force, to take up the post of God) and his new girlfriend, an incredibly irritating right-on TV producer. Both know what he's getting himself into, but Tony hasn't got a clue, poor love ("It's a job, all right?") Clark's rebirth as a bluff no-nonsense copper has also forced Harry Naylor, hitherto the series' resident bluff no-nonsense copper, to turn into Wayne Slob to make room.

So there it is: follow these simple steps and you too can take a world-class drama series and turn it into *Howard's Way*.



DOING THE ROUNDS

LAST month Dr Smesh Dewan collected a British Health Care award for 25 years' outstanding service to the casualty department at Horsham hospital. He also received a surprise from Crawley Horsham NHS trust: his job is to be axed and the department replaced by a minor injuries unit with no doctor.

Barnet general hospital may also lose its excellent casualty department. This was built up over the years by consultant and clinical director Michael Whitlock, who was surprised to learn that the **Wellhouse trust** had been advertising his post. The loss of the service will be nothing if not consistent: the general's ophthalmology and dermatology services have also been decimated *(Eyes passim)*.

● **NEWPORT's** £833,000-indebted **Royal Gwent hospital** has spent £45,000 on nurses uniforms that make it easier for them to lift and bend — and a further £300,000 refurbishing a "training room" at the Friars unit. The room, which includes a £1,500 chandelier, has been tarted up to attract trainee doctors, who will doubtless flock to Newport to luxuriate in its lighting.

● MANAGERS at **Redditch's Alexandra healthcare trust** (£600,000 under) have reacted to on-site car thefts by deciding "to manage our parking for everyone's benefit". It has employed Controlled Parking Limited to patrol the parks in uniform and ensure everyone sticks to the spaces. Car owners are being charged at least 70p for the service — and CLP has put up notices disclaiming any responsibility for theft or damage.

● **HAMPSTEAD's Royal Free hospital** apologised to GP Dr Judy Gilley after she spent 16 phone calls and a whole working day trying to persuade it to readmit a patient who had developed a potentially life-threatening clot in her vein after surgery at the trust. The trust was happy to do the operation when it had been paid for by contract — but a tad reluctant to take on the complication.

● THE **Trent** regional task force for junior doctors' hours reduction is considering sanctioning hospitals who don't meet Mrs Bottomley's "56 hours a week" December deadline, and possibly withdrawing labour altogether. As Dr Keith Reid put it: "If juniors' posts were withdrawn, the hospital would be unable to function."

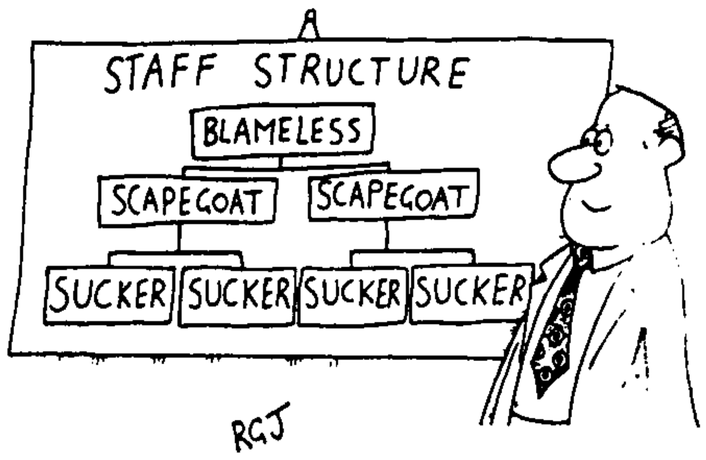
Another government target to fail miserably is for consultant expansion. A 2 percent a year increase is the absolute minimum needed to implement hours reduction and maintain a career structure, but only 1.3 percent more posts have been funded.

● CONSULTANTS at **Stafford's Foundation NHS trust** have taken umbrage at chief executive Michael Murray and his "denial of problems." Mr Murray, who received the customary vote of no-confidence as used in **Brighton and Burnley** (*Eyes passim*), was also criticised for lack of consultation and teamwork. "There is a very real concern that managers are formulating clinical policy without the involvement of senior medical staff."

● **GREENWICH healthcare NHS trust**, famed for misplacing an elderly patient in casualty, has now managed to misplace its chairman, chief executive and operations director at an estimated cost to the taxpayer of £600,000.

● AT **Liverpool's Broadgreen hospital NHS trust**, the only speech therapist trained to deal with swallowing difficulties has gone on maternity leave. Cover by a therapist from the **Royal Liverpool University hospital trust** is for "urgent" cases only and amounts to only two hours a week. Stroke victims, meanwhile, are having to learn to swallow on their own.

● A THIRD of England's blood transfusion services and up to 1,000 jobs have been binned in a £10 million savings drive. The doomed centres, at



Liverpool, Oxford, Brentford, Lancaster and **Plymouth**, often provide emergency supplies to hospitals when other centres have run out. With demand for blood rising by 2.6 percent a year, the logic of the closures remains unclear. As the National Blood Authority's chief executive John Adey put it: "The changes will help eliminate inconsistency."

● MRS G Cooper, operational manager at **Wirral hospital**, is getting tough on Christmas decorations: "These should not be hung before December 5 and should be removed before January 2. Sellotape must not be used. Should you decide to decorate the windows it is your responsibility to clean them afterwards." Merry Christmas.

● **WOLVERHAMPTON's New Cross Hospital** is doing all it can to maintain its record of patient deaths and cover-ups — with the death of a baby killed by blunders during labour which caused massive and avoidable brain damage.

If that were not tragic enough, the nurse who made the errors then made false entries in the medical records which were only noticed when the parents complained. Then the hospital *itself* launched a cover-up, refusing to tell the parents what had happened and then simply ignoring their letters.

The baby died in April, but it took until last month to get any response from New Cross, and the intervention of local MP Ken Purchase to force the **West Midlands regional health authority** to act. Now it has ordered an inquiry by two independent consultants.

M.D.

DOWN ON THE FARM

AFTER a five-day hearing in Swindon crown court, Wiltshire vet Roger Eddy (*Eyes passim*) has finally won his appeal against a prosecution brought by Wiltshire county council's senior animal inspector, former used car salesman Nigel Durnford.

Durnford alleged that Eddy had caused "unnecessary suffering" to a lame sow he had allowed to be sent for slaughter to a Trowbridge slaughterhouse in December 1991, even though the sow had been sent in "ambulance conditions".

Eddy lost the original case before Trowbridge magistrates who fined him £1,500 and ordered to pay £1,500 costs. His first appeal was heard — and won — in June 1993; but it was then overturned and ordered to be reheard in the high court.

Among the dirt dished up in court was the revelation that Durnford, in his anxiety to win at all costs, had secretly (and illegally) briefed his "expert" witnesses — during clandestine meetings in a local hostelry — and prevailed upon them to change their statements. The judge was clearly unimpressed by such tactics and awarded costs, estimated at more than £100,000, against Wiltshire county council. In these cases they are usually paid from "central funds".

After three years' agony, Eddy is now able to resume his practice, safe in the knowledge that in this case at least the word of a professional vet has been seen to mean more than that of a former used-car salesman.

TWO vets employed — for the moment, anyway — by the ministry of agriculture, aka the Maffia, have not been so lucky: they have been found guilty of "disgraceful professional conduct" and suspended from their professional body, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. One is out of action for three months, the other for six.

Their "crimes" — spotted by senior Maffia vets — concerned the issue of health certificates for sheep exported to Belgium. Anxious not to obstruct the valuable trade in live animals to welfare-friendly continental abattoirs, the vets had been signing incomplete forms, leaving the exporters to fill in the details.

But, after "grassing" to the royal college, Maffia senior vets investigated further and found that many more vets were cutting corners.

Embarrassed, the Maffia supergrasses then embarked on serial obstruction of the RCVS investigation, putting a hearing back three months. When they finally stood in front of the veterinary wise men, they then tried to suppress the report on their other vets.

ALSO unlucky is Marja-Lisa Hovi, a German-qualified vet who until recently worked as meat hygiene inspector in Bristol where she inspected the wares of Alec Jarret Ltd.

Jarret's, which holds an export licence and supplies the bulk of the stuff which goes into McDonald's beefburgers, has had difficulty providing the papers needed to show that all its cows come from BSE-free herds.

Undaunted, Jarret's has been "encouraging" Marja-Lisa to sign the "BSE-free" certificates anyway, a practice regarded as "common" among the big boys in the meat industry. When she refused, she found herself under intense pressure from her employer, Eville Jones, and from Kingswood district council, who used the services of the practice to carry out inspections at Jarret's.

When Marja continued to refuse, she found herself unemployed. Her former employer denies she was dismissed for not falsifying papers, but the matter is being taken up by the royal college.

ACCORDING to the chancellor, the costs of the "cost-effective" Meat Hygiene Service have risen from an estimated £40 million to £54 million, the extra £14 million to be funded by the taxpayer. Not bad for a "service" which has yet to start work and which will replace local councils who used to do all meat inspection for £32 million, covering nearly twice as many slaughterhouses.

'New Muckspreader'

Old Macdonald

ALBERT

THERE'S FAR TOO MANY OF OUR SMALL VILLAGE CATTLE MARKETS DISAPPEARIN'!
STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WI' ME FRIENDS AN' WE....
MISS WITHERING 1994
GET OFF!! YOU DAFT OLD BUGGER!!
WITHERING WIMMINS FRONT

NOOKS and CORNERS

IS WE stagger to the end of another year, perhaps a little self-satisfied retrospection is justified. Bankside power station has appeared several times in this column because of the scandal of the department of the environment (as was) declining to list this spectacular pile by Sir Giles Scott lest it impede its new owners, Nuclear Electric, from redeveloping the site.

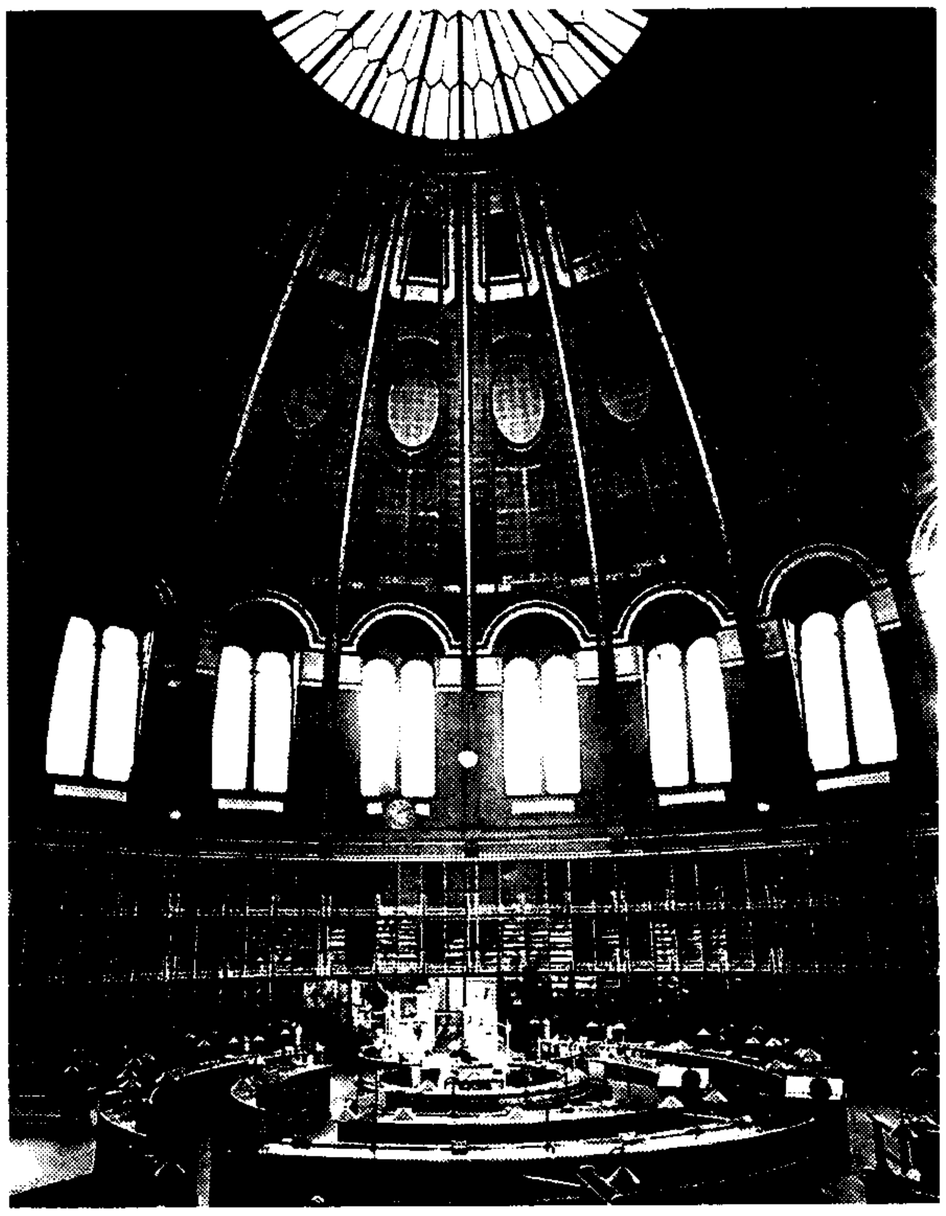
Now the Tate Gallery has decided it will make a splendid Gallery of Modern Art and has held a competition to find an architect for the conversion. Will the department of national heritage now accept English Heritage's repeated recommendation that the building is of architectural importance?

As for the competition, much wailing and gnashing of teeth has greeted the recent news that, of the six firms shortlisted, only one is British. Does that matter? We think not, providing a designer is chosen who can respect Scott's superb jazz-modern brick exterior while doing something interesting inside. After all, the number of fashionable British architects who can be trusted with an historic building — whether of the 17th century or the 20th — can be counted on the fingers of one hand. And at least the job did not go to Sir Norman Foster.

It is, of course, part of Foster's genius that he wins almost any competition he goes in for. This is what the competition system is all about: encouraging knighted talent. Back in July he naturally won the competition to do something with the Reading Room of the British Museum. Rather a pity this, because Sidney Smirke's extraordinary iron-framed rotunda makes a wonderful reading room, but thanks to Mrs Thatcher's blinkered insistence on completing an unwanted and unloved new British Library in St Pancras, it will become redundant. So the British Museum wants to do something with it and with the whole quadrangle of Robert Smirke's original Greek Revival building in the middle of which it stands.

Foster proposed filling most of this space with a new oval building — containing auditoria, cafes and, most important, shops — wrapped around the rotunda and covering the lot with a roof. This did not meet with the expected universal applause: indeed, the editor of *Building Design* even commented: "Those appreciative of classical design will wince at the way the oval rotunda's extremities cramp the porticoes centred in each of Robert Smirke's facades, and then reflect that the opaque new roof will deprive them of the strong light needed to show them at their best". But of course Foster had to win.

And now he has improved his design. The oval



seems to have diminished a little, there is more accommodation in the basement and what is left of Smirke's quadrangle is now "covered by a translucent steel-supported lightweight roof". Oddly enough, another of the three shortlisted schemes, by Rick Mather, envisaged new space in the basement and leaving the Reading Room as a rotunda standing in the middle of Smirke's quadrangle, the space being made usable by being covered with a lightweight transparent roof.

But Mather could not possibly have won, could he? After all, he is not an international superstar. Nor is he knighted, so he cannot be a genius like our own Sir Norm.

This is also award time, and the winner of our own Hugh Casson Medal for 1994 will be announced in the next issue. Meanwhile the RIBA has given its top annual gong to the new Waterloo International Station by Sir "Nick" Grimshaw. No bad choice, in fact: although self-consciously overdetailed, the new long train shed is certainly in the great railway tradition represented by such things as the Paddington and St Pancras train sheds.

The absurdity is that the thing will soon be redundant. For London's main international rail terminal is not to be at Waterloo but at St Pancras — if ever our railway-hating government manages to get a line built through Kent. No bad thing that the absurdly extravagant scheme by Sir Norman Foster (who else?) to squeeze a new station underneath King's Cross has been abandoned. But now, instead of adopting the sensible Alan Baxter plan of a new international interchange station behind King's Cross in the old goods' yard, British Rail (does it still exist?) has decided to put the trains into St Pancras.

Brilliant! This means that, say, the 8.05 Wemyss Bay to Wuppertal Express will have to reverse out of St Pancras again before heading on to the Channel tunnel. It will also mean that W.H. Barlow's sublime and spectacular train shed will somehow have to be extended northwards to accommodate long trains; that the viaduct will have to be widened; and that, under the current proposals, suburban platforms will be tacked on to the side of St Pancras, so both spoiling a magnificent building and ruining its environs. Such are the depths of stupidity we have reached in the nation which produced the Stephensons and Brunel.

'Piloti'

Pseuds Corner

Sometimes, one doesn't have to look very hard for symptoms of the age we live in — they squat like visible toads on our hectic postmodern pond.

JAMES WOOD
Guardian

Like hip hop, jungle fuses "flow" and "rupture", regular and random, or, in junglist slang, "rollin" and "ruff". The jagged jolting breaks trigger muscular reflexes, motor impulses, maybe t'ai chi energy zones, so that you find yourself throwing kung fu shapes, tensing and sparring in a deadly ballet of feint, jab and parry. Jungle remakes your nervous system, primes you for end-of-millennium survivalism. But ambient jungle like "Timeless" is riven by contradiction. Sonically, it incarnates two opposed responses to a threatening environment: hyper-vigilance (drum and bass) and escapism (floating, narcotic atmospherics), tension and release.

SIMON REYNOLDS
Melody Maker

His [John Travolta's] eating style was combative — forward leaning, elbows cocked. His jaws did not receive the mouthfuls passively, but pounced, took prisoners, so that ingestion became an exercise in Seek and Destroy.

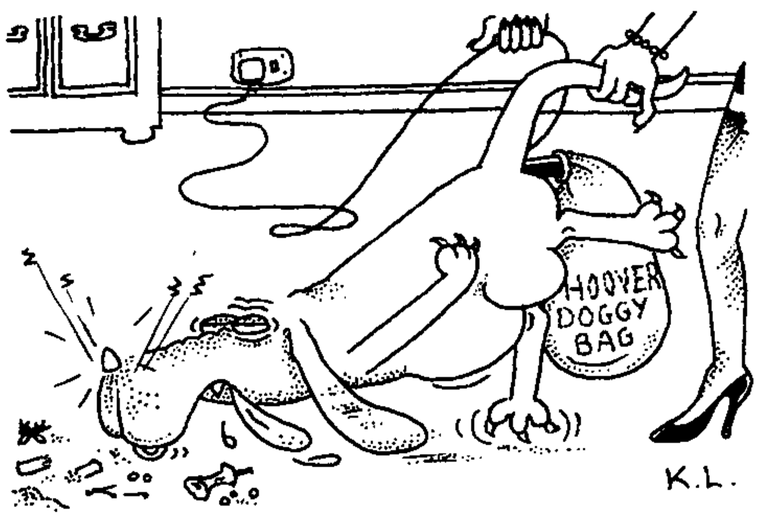
Except that one bite eluded him. A leaf of lettuce slipped off the edge of his plate, dummied the despairing stab of his fork, and fell on the floor. For a moment he looked devastated. Then he skimmed a glance at me, to see if I'd noticed. When he saw that I had, he flashed his patented shit-eating grin.

It was a conspirator's smirk; a look that made me his partner in crime. The world was not fair, it said. People lied, and cities burned, and lettuce leaves made scenes in restaurants.

NIK COHN
Guardian Weekend

Tony Grist, a former Anglican vicar, is a poet, witch and founder member of the Iseum of Hermes and Aphrodite.

Guardian



Model Susie Bick, leading lady of the new Brit glamour, has for some time been inseparable from her Bassett Fauve de Bretagne, Hoover. "He's brilliant company," she says. "I think there are a few things making people choose animal companions — personal safety, the AIDS threat, and wanting to be independent."

Elle

Open with care... contains live theatre

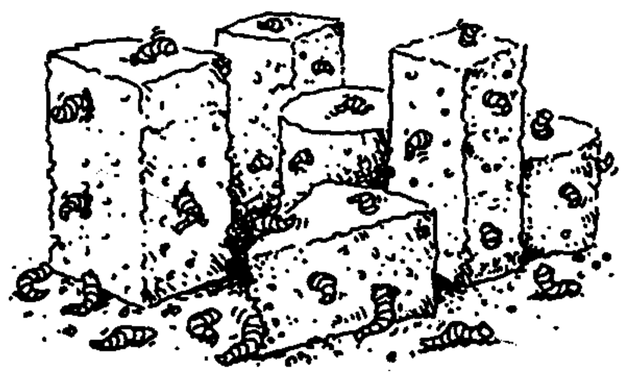
Franking on envelope sent by
Adam Kenwright PR

Event-Cities presents its projects as a preliminary taxonomy for this new urban discourse. What was the theoretical scope of reference in Tschumi's previous writing is here limited by and explicitly linked to a set of spatial tropes. I use the word 'spatial' advisedly as they are actually closer to narrative tropes or figures. In a sense, Tschumi's declared interest in "event" rather than space, in the "movement of bodies" rather that style or representation, amounts to the supplanting of space by narrative. What else could it mean? The interesting element arises in the proposal that we will each write our own narratives, magically, unconsciously in the context of a framework constructed out of the early experiments of literary and musical modernism. This is what is on offer. Connecting the aspirations of modernist indeterminacy with programmatic values. Stating the case rather than proffering a unique solution.

RICHARD PATTERSON
Building Design

CONTRIBUTORS: N. Ritchie, P. South, N. Brenton, P. Cornford, C. Collett, S. Bennett, K. Cowling.

£10 paid for entries



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

MURKEYSIDE

EVER since city worthies decided that Petrona Lashley could not become Liverpool's first black woman mayor because of her petty criminal past, an "acceptable" replacement has been sought.

So come on down John "Mr Magoo" Hamilton, the former "leader" of the council in the "militant" 1980s who, by his own admission, was held virtual prisoner in his municipal offices by Derek Hatton's lumpen acolytes.

Liverpool Labour party now draws a veil over those dark days of town hall Trotskyism and the sorry episode which led poor old John to be surcharged and disqualified from public office. Falling over itself to rehabilitate him, the party can also forget that Hamilton even voted to abolish the very post of lord mayor that he now aspires to fill.

The only obstacle to Hamilton becoming mayor seems to be the Liverpool electorate. Voters have failed to return him the last two times he has stood since his ban ended. Senior party hacks now say a safe seat will be found for him.

"Energetic" was how one supporter said John would be in his future role. Yet he literally sat out his wilderness years asleep in front of a calor gas fire in the Liverpool office of the National Union of Teachers, of which he was nominally president. When roused to sign anything, he would slouch back into slumber. Union officials would then shout in his ear: "We'll sign it 'pp John Hamilton' just like nice Mr Hatton used to."

HACKNEY

WHILE all right-thinking socialists were bemoaning the fat pay rise of British Gas supremo Cedric Jones, Hackney council's Labour rulers were busy agreeing a 25 per cent increase for their next chief executive.

This will add £16,000 — more than most of the council's lumpen proletariat earn in a year — to the existing £64,000 salary.

The vacancy has been caused by the imminent departure of Jerry White, who has been appointed one of three national local government ombudsmen investigating complaints made by the public against councils. He will know all about that, of course: Hackney regularly tops the national league of council complaints.

EALING

SHOULD Labour-run Ealing council in west London really shell out £1.7 million for an untested ICL computer system to administer housing benefits?

ICL recently lost a £1 million court case brought by St Albans city council, who claimed that poll tax software supplied by the company was responsible for miscalculating which residents were eligible to pay — an error which eventually cost the authority £1.3 million in government grant.

And ICL is also being sued for £1 million by Surrey county council over alleged faults in its council tax package, while Lambeth, Southwark and Staffordshire Moorlands are considering legal action against ICL to secure compensation for alleged software problems.

In Ealing, meanwhile, the council still hasn't learned from past mistakes. ICL equipment bought a few years ago for a poll tax and council tax package assessed benefits incorrectly and had to be written off — as the Unison union has reminded council leaders.

HAVERING

DO the Tories practise what they preach? Not in Romford, where removal king and leading Tory Albie Tebbutt (see *Eyes passim*) is still in trouble with the Child Support Agency over maintenance payments for his five-year-old love child.

Aggro-loving Albie — he received a four-month suspended sentence for attacking a neighbour three years ago — is more than £1,500 behind in payments and faces court action. The last time he was in court he coughed up £1,600 at the last minute and no doubt will do so again.

However, a harmless inquiry by Albie's long-suffering ex-mistress to CSA headquarters to find out if he had made any payments in living memory was greeted with the news that the Havering headbanger was on the "politically sensitive file" — even though he was booted off the council in Labour's sweep to victory in May. Whose interests does the CSA have at heart and why should it keep municipal non-entities on a special file? No one knows.

BIRMINGHAM

EVER resourceful Birmingham city council has poured £200,000 into a pub. Not just any old pub: a pub that had no beer and never actually opened.

The Bees Nees non-alcoholic pub was the idea of Ladywood Community Business, a project set up to create jobs in the deprived inner city. Its huge budget came mainly from the city's economic development committee under its former chairman, the excitingly-named Labour councillor Albert Bore.

Quite coincidentally, Ladywood is Bore's ward, and many of those employed by Ladywood Community Business were members of the, er, Labour party.

The only project Ladywood Community Business actually got off the ground was a mobile creche — basically some community workers with a van full of toys. When asked to provide statistics on how many jobs it had actually created or people it had trained, its managers mysteriously vanished.

If the auditors want to find them, of course, they need only attend the next meeting of Ladywood Labour party.

EYE TOLD YOU SO

NEWS FLASH: Remember Birmingham-based Harambee Housing Association? Under the chairmanship of Nancy Johnson (see *Eyes passim*), it became the most indebted housing association in Britain — but now it has a new claim to fame. Harambee has just become the first housing association ever to be put into liquidation by the Housing Corporation; and 1,000 people could lose their homes.

Johnson, meanwhile, still has one job as head of Birmingham's women's unit, but is fighting disciplinary charges there, too.

Pre-School Nursery Facility Rhymes

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall —
In his new shell-suit.

ORCADIAN NEWS

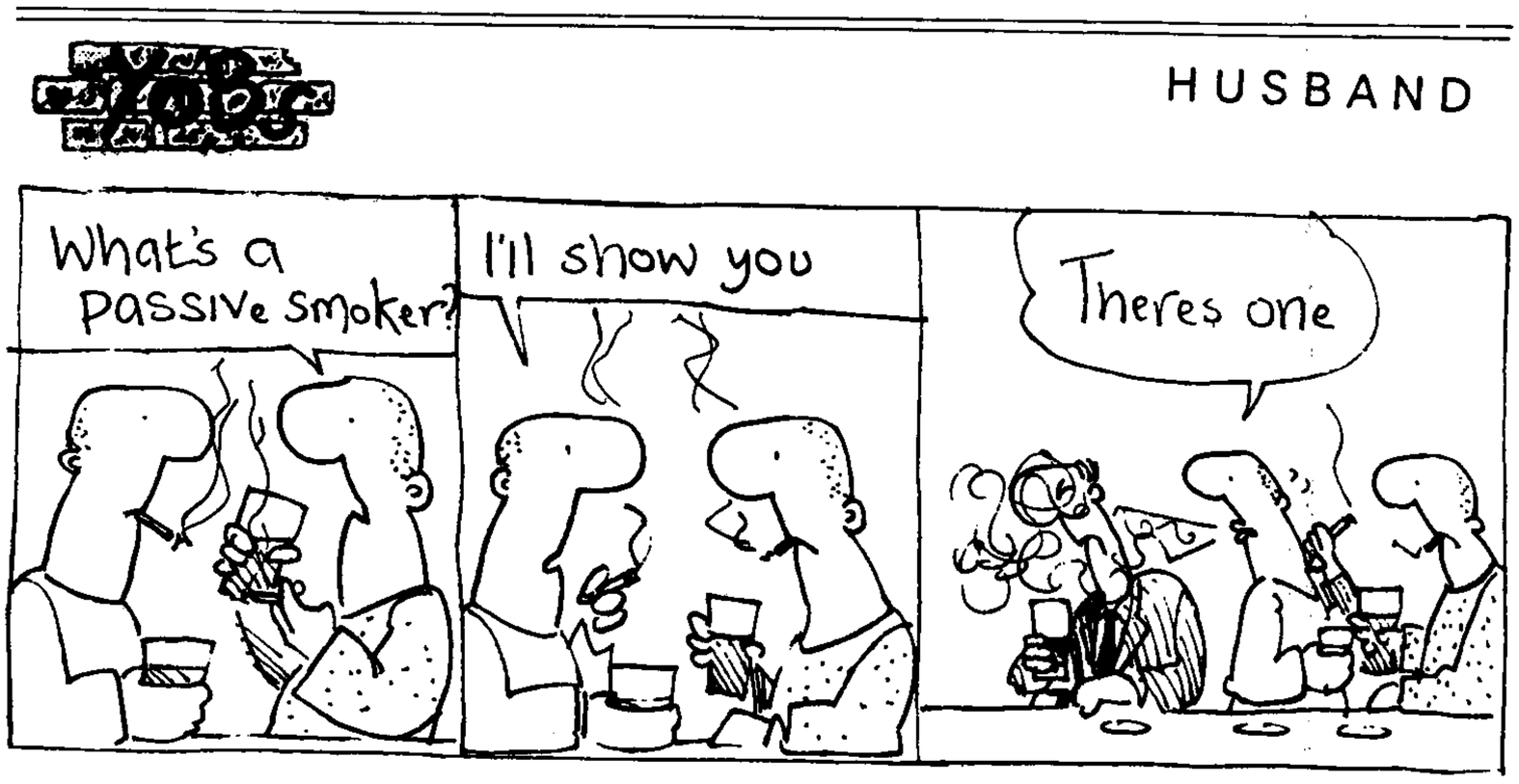
ALMOST four years after a tiny Orkney village hit the headlines when nine children were snatched from their beds by social workers, Orkney's social services department has announced new guidelines under which it intends to work.

No mention has been made that social workers completely ignored existing guidelines back in 1991 — perhaps because the director of social services didn't know what they were — but presumably they intend to comply with the new ones.

That shouldn't be hard: they appear simply to give social workers permission to do all the things they weren't allowed to do under the old ones. Under the new guidelines:

- A child can refuse to be interviewed... and yet still be interviewed. This process drew a lot of criticism, but now social workers can do it officially.
- There is no provision for a child to refuse to have a medical examination. In 1991 children were forced or tricked into having these frightening examinations and this, too, attracted a lot of flak.
- Social workers have finally got their own way: family and members of the media will be excluded from future hearings. (Throughout the fiasco the media generally insisted on telling the truth. This made social workers look incompetent, and such irresponsible coverage will now be prevented.)
- A child who alleges abuse must always be believed. Given the forced interviews and medicals, plus the track record of social workers, this sounds like a recipe for a disaster.

Indeed complaints are already flooding in. So it's lucky that social workers (*Shurely "parents and children"? Ed.*) will have the new laws and guidelines to protect them.



AFTER LYME BAY...

WHILE Winchester crown court heard of the criminal incompetence of jail-bound Peter Kite, md of the St Albans activities centre from where four teenagers canoed to their deaths in Lyme Bay, an odd hearing was taking place in Grosvenor Gardens, London.

At the Broadcasting Complaints Commission Mr Bill Higginson, the inspector who vetted the centre 10 months before the tragedy in March 1993, was pursuing a complaint about *On the Line*, a BBC TV investigation into the lack of safety and vetting procedures at his own outdoor activities centre in Wales.

Higginson, a former professional cricketer, owns and runs Rock Park at Llandrindod Wells, Powys. It was rated "unsatisfactory" as long ago as 1991 in *Holiday Which?*; and after the Lyme tragedy, the *Which?* report attracted the attention of TV crews from Channel 4's *Dispatches* and BBC's *On the Line*.

The latter persuaded an international canoeist to apply for a job at Rock Park; and, as he later told the BBC, he was none too impressed by safety standards there. One of the most alarming lapses was that his qualifications, which he said were on record at the British Canoe Union (BCU) and the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS), were not checked out.

Higginson complained about various items in the BBC programme. But when a photocopy of the instructor's application form was produced, someone observed that it wasn't only his qualifications that Rock Park had failed to check. The applicant had crossed out the wrong bit when answering the question: "Do you have a criminal record?" And as the BBC panel pointed out to Higginson, he could have been employing a convicted paedophile — but he didn't bother to find out.

It soon became clear Higginson was not even aware that he could and should have checked applicants' names against a police register of known child abusers. But this was not the first time he had put his foot in it.

Earlier this year he phoned the *Times Educational Supplement* in response to an article on outdoor activities safety. He claimed to speak with authority — as co-founder of the British Activity Holiday Association (BAHA) and as someone who had carried out some 120 inspections of centres. However, in the course of one call, according to the *TES*, he destroyed any lingering confidence in the BAHA's procedures.

Higginson expressed strong doubts about the industry's self-regulation — even though he was a key part of the inspecting structure — and admitted that he had carried out the last inspection of the St Albans centre before the tragedy. Nor did he think that an alternative inspection scheme set up by the Wales Tourist Board would be any better. He claimed to know of a centre that had failed the inspection but was still in business. The centre that had failed was Higginson's own, Rock Park. It was the only one out of 120 outdoor activity centres in Wales that had not been approved, but it continues to display the WTB logo prominently on its promotional literature.

As an authoritative campaigner for greater safety in outdoor activity centres, what qualifications does Higginson have, other than being a football and cricket coach? He joined the industry without any check or appraisal himself, and has employed people with similar laxity. So perhaps he is well-qualified to speak for an industry blighted by poor self-regulation, inadequate qualifications and inspectors who are not even qualified to instruct children, let alone examine those doing the instruction.

Higginson has left the BAHA claiming its inspection criteria were inadequate but better than nothing. He also now says he did not know St Albans was taking children out on the open sea. But even if he had known he would have been able to do nothing about it: he does not have a canoeing qualification to go to sea to carry out inspections; and the BAHA has no power to sanction members anyway.

The lessons of the Lyme Bay tragedy for the industry should be clear enough. But will the government learn them?

Letters

Private Eye

Deniable

Sir,

*Paul Foot correctly pointed out that the foreign office is using a false premise to avoid naming companies which made technology used in Iraq's nuclear bomb programme (*EYE *859). The government uses civil service-speak to imply wrongly that nuclear inspectors regard the companies named in their detailed inspection reports as confidential.*

But the government's position is even more incredible than the EYE *stated. HM customs persuaded the lord chief justice to gag some of these documents in a secret hearing a year ago. Yet, anyone can ask the UN to see copies of the reports and associated documents which number more than 1,000 pages. I and a colleague did just that, and we found that 16 British companies were identified as the makers of equipment at 10 Iraqi nuclear sites. We made a report for the ITV current affairs show* 3-D, *and wrote about it in two national newspapers.*

The government's capers with the truth deflect attention from an issue which even Lord Justice Scott's wide-ranging inquiry has hardly examined. Britain exported technology which Saddam Hussein needed to build the bomb. Our export controls failed. Why? Because, inter alia, the agency responsible for promoting trade also has the tiresome task of controlling exports. A clear conflict of interests. Solution? Split up the DTI. Create a proper export control agency. Get real about proliferation.

EYE *readers will be glad to know that one pair of British business executives were convicted and jailed for attempting to export nuclear technology to Iraq in 1990. Unfortunately, they were innocent. They were set up, made an example of and then quietly cleared last May.*

Yours faithfully,
MARK WATTS,

London WC1.

Sparting shot

Sir,

Lefties Work at Graun Shock — so the truth is out at last thanks to the SPECTATOR, *which has established precious little else since 1828. To save further investigation I can reveal that, over the years, the* GUARDIAN *has employed its share of right-wingers, right pratts, writers, subs, sots, gits and — until recently — a Gott.*

I greatly regret that a long-standing member of the National Union of Journalists felt compelled to resign from the paper after being attacked in the snide way he was. But the hacks still working here are taking a good deal of comfort from the thought that we must be doing something right if the spooks feel the need to circulate their friends with the sort of smears which forced Richard Gott to resign.

Yours sincerely,
BRIAN WILLIAMS
(FoC, NUJ Chapel London),
The Guardian, London EC1.

PS: There's a tenner in it for you the next time you're on the wrong end of a libel judgment if you can avoid the temptation to head this letter "Gottcha".

Ad Nauseam

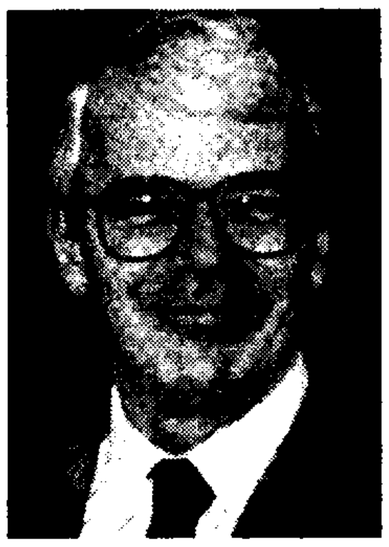
Sir,

I believe the Ford Motor Company is under the impression that there is a similarity between its current television ad for the Ford Mondeo and Nicholas Roeg's superb film DON'T LOOK NOW.

If so, it is sadly mistaken.

JAMES PETTS,
Via demon.co.uk

Lookalike



Brown

Major

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the resemblance between the Prime Minister and Mr Brown, from the Dr Seuss children's book HOP ON POP*? Do you suppose they are related?*

Yours etc,
E. WILLIAMS,

London SW2.

Welsh leak

Sir,

As a victim of the "mysterious virus" (Water News, EYE *860), as the custodians of the West Wales beaches like to have us believe, may I be permitted to make an observation? My excellent GP diagnosed my condition in micro seconds and made the necessary arrangements to have me hospitalised immediately.*

The disease is known as Guillain-Barre Syndrome and attacks the central nervous system leaving the victim completely paralysed. In about 5 percent of cases the patient dies. I find it somewhat odd that the West Wales medical authorities are unable to diagnose the ailment. One question I would like to have answered is: "Why were no questions asked of myself as to my whereabouts in the week or so prior to my collapse?" I am only 70 years old, and it seems of little consequence in the great game of cover-up.

Yours sincerely,
FRANK H. THOMAS,

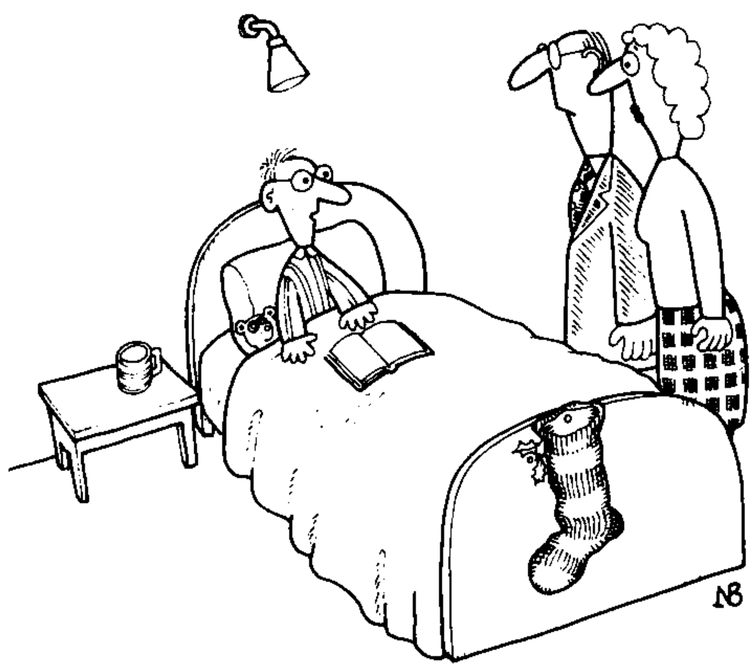
Narberth, Dyfed.

Blow me down!

Sir,

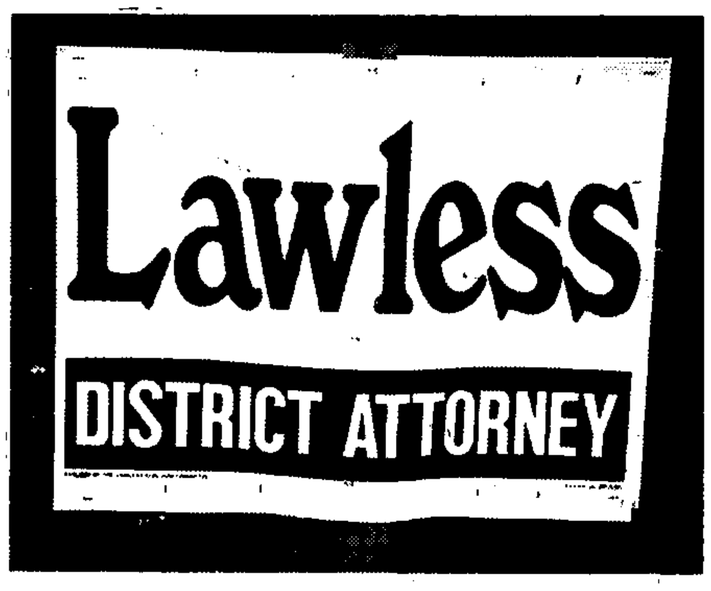
The rumours you persist in printing concerning myself and Steven Berkoff are untrue.

CHRISSY ILEY,
London W1.



"I don't believe in an external, objective Santa, but I see him as an ideal of the charitable instinct"

I-SPY *Cape Cod*



Submitted by Christopher Haines. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Dear bill

Sir,

I wonder if any other of your readers have noticed the remarkable dissimilarity between Robert Jones, backbench MP, who said just a year ago: "I am very glad to support the energy conservation bill. It is long overdue. I shall urge the government to support it", and Robert Jones MP, newly-appointed government minister for energy conservation, who says of the same energy conservation bill: "Frankly we have much more practical things to get on with." "I deplore the Bill."

Are they by any chance not related? I think we should be told.

Yours sincerely,
CHRISTOPHER PADLEY,
Market Rasen, Lincs.

O·B·N

In the flesh he is easily the most exquisitely beautiful man in British politics... The grooming is immaculate; the clothes, conservative, but tasteful; the thick glossy mop, and, arising from it in defiance of Newton's Law, the perpendicular quiff, a triumph of the hairdresser's artifice; the lean, muscular, strong-necked torso; the dark, saturnine face; the coal-black eyes; the cruel nose; the thick, sensuous lips opening into a pretty smile...

JOHN SWEENEY
(on Michael Portillo)
The Observer

Submitted by June Kinchin.

£10 paid for all entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

Big boob

Sir,

*So W.H.Smith in New Malden have placed your organ amidst the kneetremblers on the top shelf (*EYE *860)? Well, it goes from bad to worse. W.H. Smith in Broad Street, Reading, have placed the* EYE *on the top shelf, but next to* HALLO! *magazine. And I thought the Marquesa was a satirical creation. Your secret is out!*

Yours sincerely,
BOB CHAPMAN,
Reading, Berkshire

Child proof

Sir,

Your correspondent, I. Manders, complains (2 December) that his local branch of W.H. Smith is stocking PRIVATE EYE *on the top shelf "because children might see it".*

If children cannot buy your organ, who will?

Yours sincerely,
PETER SMITH (42½),
Repton, Derby.

Stirling work

Sir,

*Piloti hopes that on the new "mauve-pink" or "magnolia-beige" walls of the Clore Gallery the paintings of Turner may look a little better (*EYE *859). I have not met anyone who thinks that they do.*

*The view of Piloti has been consistently (*EYE *588) that the failures of the Clore have all been due to its architect, Sir James Stirling, and would have been avoided by the Tate Gallery's curators if they had had their way. But Stirling has been dead for several years and the curators rule, and yet the result is still lamentable.*

In fact Stirling was given a hopeless brief by the curators and a site which was inadequate in size and situation. The resulting failure is a classic example of muddled thinking, and for that we have to thank Sir Alan Bowness and Dr Martin Butlin CBE, both honoured subsequently for their "achievement".

Yours faithfully,
DR SELBY WHITTINGHAM,
London SW5.

Repel with a cause

Sir,

I find the ad for Manson t-shirts repellent. Are you really so desperate for money that you are prepared to take it from people with such a sick and sickening sense of humour? Surely such "jokes" are too much, even for your jaded appetite. They are certainly too much for mine. Please ban them from now. Mass murderers aren't funny.

Sincerely,
PETER KENNEDY,
London W11.

Unforgettable

Sir,

Your correspondent John Davies (18 Nov) is correct in thinking that the revolutionary Saundersheimer treatment for Alzheimer's disease has not proved effective for other sufferers. Sadly, he forgot to give the address of the Alzheimer's Disease Society, Gordon House, 10 Greencoats Place, London SW1P 1PH. It might be in a better position to help his mother than Her Majesty's Prison Service.

Regards,
N.O. MARBLES,
Address unknown.

Loyal subject

Sir,

Following the example of the Earl of Yarmouth, not only am I a great fan of PRIVATE EYE *and* HAVE I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, *but* GUSH! *is the funniest thing on the radio in years and I also possess many Jimmy Somerville records.*

Does this display of arslikhan guarantee publication of my letter, or do I need a title as well?

Yours faithfully,
TIM FOOTMAN,
London SW19.

SOMETHING TOLD THE POSTMAN THIS WAS GOING TO BE A DIFFICULT CHRISTMAS

Please address letters for publication to Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or e-mail to strobes@cix.compulink.co.uk (marked "For Publication"). Due to the overwhelming response, e-mail is unlikely to attract a reply.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

Michael Barrymore: *Where you from then?*
Contestant: *Chesterfield, town of the Crooked Spire.*
Barrymore: *Why do they call it the Crooked Spire?*
Contestant: *Because it's crooked.*
ITV
(John Stewart)

"The men have been transferred to Bracknell police station — which has been the scene of police activity all day."
BBC1 News
(Stephen Berry)

"The referee's had a generally good game, and only put a few feet wrong."
RAY WILKINS, Channel 4
(P.A. Spindloe)

Libby Purves: *Why call the firm 'Bloodaxe Books'?*
Neil Astley: *I chose it because it rhymes.*
Radio 4
(Tony Mitchener)

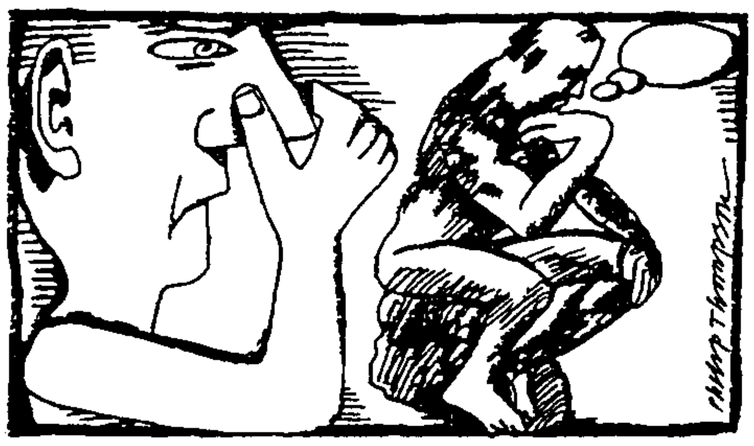
"His talent was teeming out of his ears when he had the ball at his feet."
BRIAN CLOUGH, BBC1
(Andrew Stilwell)

HOM SAP BY DAVID AUSTIN

FUNNY OLD WORLD

"If I had my way, I would ban people entirely from museums," Mr Iven M. Nzillah informed the readership of *Zambia Heritage News*. But, if they have to be allowed in, then they should wear no clothes, and it is absolutely vital that they also control their farts."

Mr Nzillah, Head of Cultural Heritage at the National Heritage Conservation Commission, went on: "Many people go to a gallery or a museum when it is raining, because it offers them the nearest shelter, but their wet clothes tend to increase humidity levels, which damages the exhibits. The humble fart, released without second thought, is just as hazardous. research has shown that the average person produces two milligrams of



sulphides a day in farts, making them the major source of pollution in a crowded gallery. The gas contains lots of acid which eats away at the silver used in old negatives and black-and-white prints.

"I agree with my colleagues in European galleries on this matter. There are only two effective solutions to the problems of damage to our national treasures. Firstly, no clothes or no admission. And secondly, people must control themselves, and cut down drastically on the amount of bio-effluent they emit. Thank you for your interest. I am going to be away from my office for two months, much against my will." *(The Times of Zambia, 20/9/94. Spotter — John Hart)*

—o—

o *"Holidays abroad? Never again. We paid £1,000 and it was bloody hell from first to last. We're both absolutely disgusted."*

Martin Mears and his wife Marina, who run the City Arms pub in Cardiff, were recounting the events of their disastrous trip to Los Cristianos, Tenerife. "Just before we arrived at the hotel, we learned that they had found the headless body of a Moroccan man in a suitcase in the foyer. It was puke-making — his head had been left on the beach. I said to Marina: 'This place isn't all it was cracked up to be in the brochure', and I was right because, when we arrived, it just got worse. On the second day, someone committed suicide by jumping off a fourth-floor balcony. I can't say I was all that surprised — the balconies were covered with barbed wire, the beds had two-inch thick foam mattresses, so nobody could sleep, and, when we complained that the floor was crawling with cockroaches, the porter threw a tin of insecticide at us and told us to fuck off in Spanish. Our taxi driver from the airport had used the same phrase when we refused him a tip, and he translated it for us."

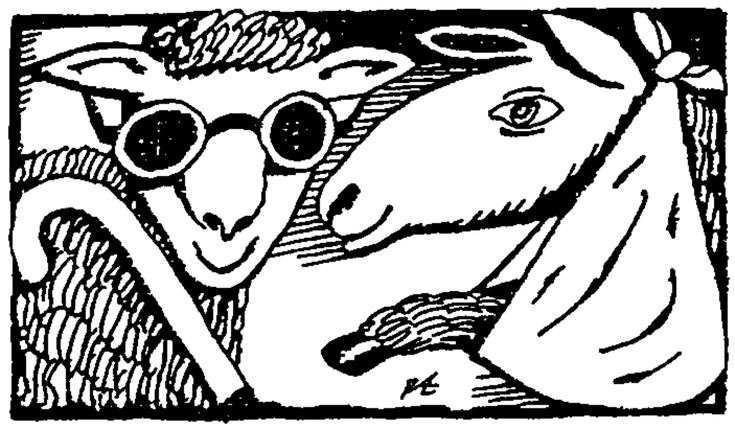
An Airtours spokesman said: "We are concerned to hear that our clients were unhappy with aspects of their holiday. We will investigate their complaints." (Belfast News Letter, 30/8/94. Spotter — Graham Johnston)

Compiled by

VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

—o—

o "Herding sheep has been Bob's whole life, and now he is very unhappy," Jane Sangster, the owner of the Grampian Dog Sanctuary at Forgue, told reporters. "The trouble is, he's twelve years old, arthritic, deaf, incontinent, and was half-blind

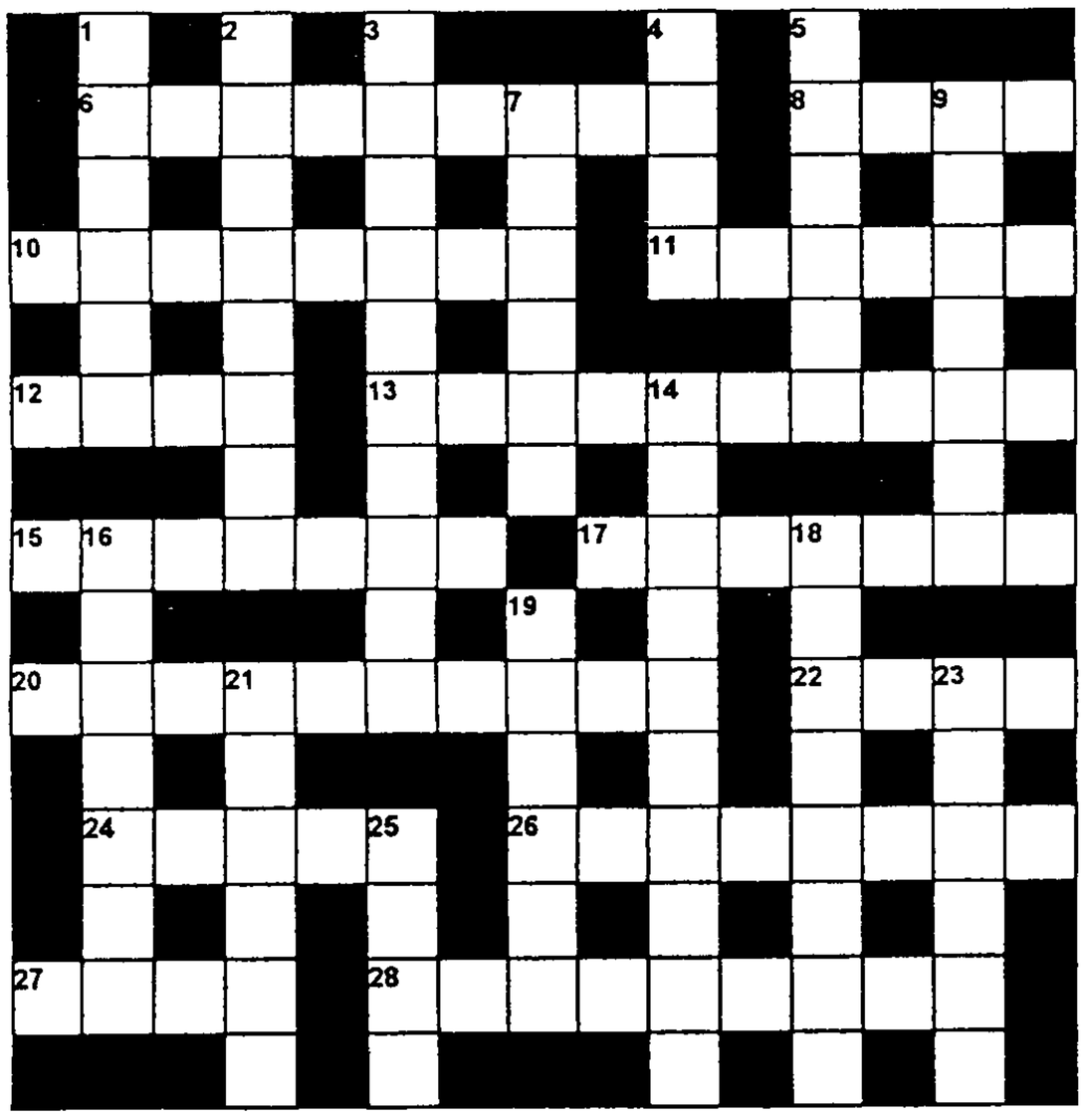


when he was brought in. It's sad watching him try to herd sheep, because even the slowest flocks can outrun him.

"Some of our workers tried to comfort Bob with an inflatable sheep, but he wasn't fooled. The poor thing is pining away, and our only hope is to find some extremely slow sheep for him. If any of your readers live in a croft, with a few sheep that are getting on a bit themselves, then we'd be very pleased to hear from them." *(The Scotsman, 29/8/94. Spotter — Gillian Tait)*

EYE CROSSWORD 17 by Cyclops

£100 Winner S. BARFIELD



ACROSS

6 The minister behind Lilley (there being no little woman) (9)
8 Arseholes Daily is back (4)
10/3 Major's big dread: no evidence of repeated Con revival and little time to get in (4,2,2,10)
11/24 Rag produced when Rupert's organs get hard on the inside (6,5)
12 Taki's an exiled awful travesty (4)
13 Crack peer? (5,5)
15 Kinky Ron Dearing, organ out, boring away (7)
17 Major debut performance — electorate finally abandoned (7)
20 Lots of cleavage expected from likely Government-appointed boss? (7,3)
22 Stretcher takes motorists by the thousand (4)
24 (see 11)
26 Shag too much through Act One — time to finish (6,2)
27 Club that Lady Thatcher! (4)
28 State of endless stink at heart of Italian corruption (9)

DOWN

1 Stir produced by hospital head (1-5)
2 A bit of a dauber, he's into abstract art to a point (8)
3 (see 10)
4 Studies dicks (4)
5 The Queen's butt squeezed into skimpy underwear (6)
7 Research *Eye* at university (4,2)
9 Crappy english public house poet: infallible best-seller (3,4)
14 This brigade likes them well hung (6-2-2)
16 Could well be unstable at core, right? (7)
18 Player who had a divine touch? (8)
19 Meaning one should, we hear, stick member in (6)
21 Dawn's nearly finished bonking (6)
23 Chair smashed over head of Conservative former prime minister (6)
25 Prince seen after wild LSD party (4)

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 28.12.94. Entries to "Crossword", Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 16

ACROSS: 8 Deputy 9 (See 12) 10 Journalist 11 Nuke 12/9 Funny Old World 13 Smart Bomb 16 Tidy Sum 17 Baghdad 19 Anarchist 22 Filth 24 GMTV 26 Leadership 27 McKenzie 28 Trashy.

DOWN: 1 Revolution 2 Mulroney 3 Wyman 4 Podium 5 Editorial 6 Hobnob 7 Flak 14 Maastricht 15 Buthelezi 18 Hailsham 20 Review 21 States 23 Getty 25 Mace.

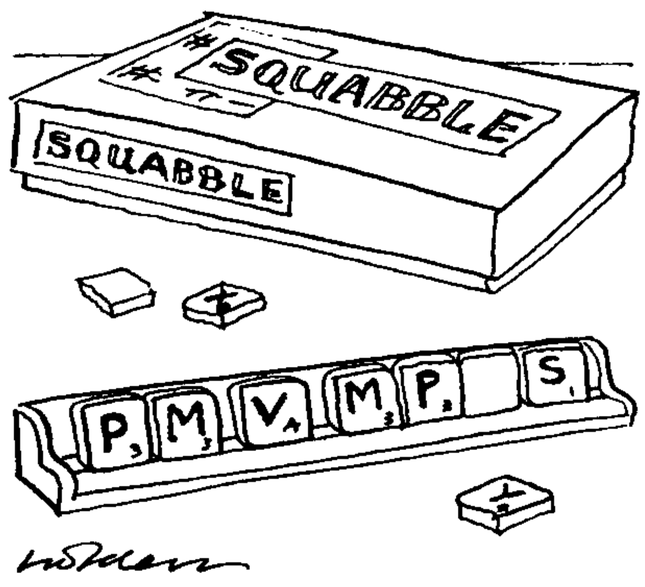
The Secret Diary of John Major aged 47¾

Monday

Today is the historic debate on the European budget. It will be a very important vote, unless of course we lose, in which case it will only be a technical hiccup. My friend Mr Clarke has explained that the money we are giving to Brussels is only a very small amount, although he could not remember the exact figure. And anyway I gave my solemn word to Mr Herr Kohl and Mr Monsieur Mitterrand in 1992 that they could have whatever they liked, to prove that we are at the heart of Europe and in the fast lane, although of course we are going slowly. As I explained to my wife Norman: "I can hardly reverse backwards down the fast lane when everyone behind me is hooting and flashing their lights, can I?" "Why don't you just do a U-turn?", she said. "That's what you normally do." I carried on eating my Kellogg's Honey Frostrups in silence, although I did say that I was treating the vote as a matter of confidence in my government. "I have every confidence that you will lose," she said jokingly.

Tuesday

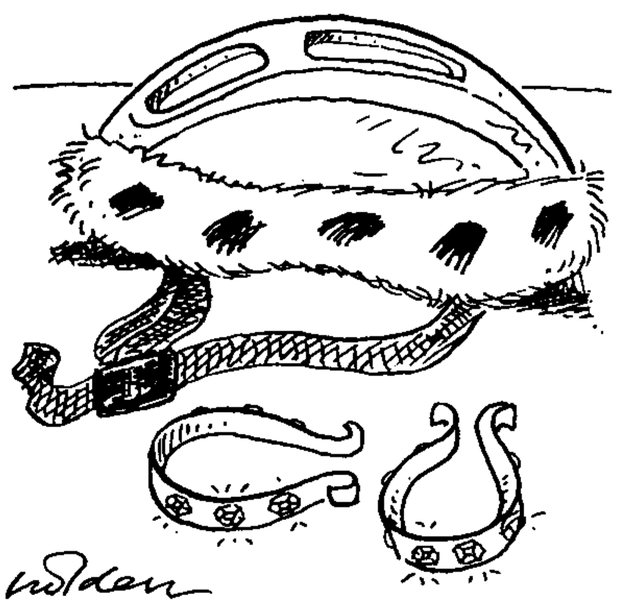
Norman was right about that silly and totally unimportant vote, which will not bring down my government. Oh no. Just because 319 MPs happened to vote against me doesn't mean anything. There are still 311 who supported me, which is what matters in my view, and shows that I still have the confidence of almost everyone, except eight people who are in no small measure Loonies, Bastards, Barmies, Traitors and SEVERAL DOZEN APPLES, PEARS AND BANANAS SHORT OF A PICNIC — which no one would invite them to anyway because they are all BASTARDS. I immediately called in my friend Mr Ryder, who is the Chief Whip, and told him that they could no longer be my friends and that he must take away their party whip.



"But prime minister," he said, "that means that they will no longer have to vote for the government." "They don't anyway," I said, "because they are Bastards. But now we have punished them, they will soon fall into line. You just wait." Mr Ryder opened the window and jumped out, just like Mr Lamont used to do before he became my ex-friend and the biggest BASTARD AND LOONY OF THEM ALL!

Wednesday

Everything is completely back to normal, I am glad to say. For instance, the Tory newspapers have gone back to their proper job of attacking the Labour Party and Mr Blair. This is because he wants to send his son to a private school so that he can get lots of 'O' Levels. Personally, I cannot see why he is going to all this trouble when you don't need any 'O' Levels to get to the top in my new Classless Britain! And the Labour Party have made another terrible blunder by calling for a "slimmed-down" Royal Family like they have in Denmark where the Queen rides round on a bicycle and stays married to her husband. This will make Mr Blair's party even more unpopular, as is shown by the *Daily Mail*'s poll, which says that only 78 percent are in favour of the kind of monarchy Labour are suggesting.



Thursday

I am not inconsiderably worried about the very worrying situation in Ireland. It seems that there is no clear leadership, the government no longer has a majority and there is not even a proper prime minister. We are very lucky in Britain that we do not live in Ireland, oh yes.

Friday

Today is another historic day, when we shall show who is in charge in this country by our vote to put VAT on domestic fuel, as we were told to by Brussels. Not that I can reveal this because it is a secret. In public I tell everyone that this brilliant idea is completely my own. I am confident that we will have a very good majority on this one. The so-called rebels will support us because they are so keen to get back into my good books, and out of those other books, eg the ones from Ryman's with "Loonies" and "Bastards" written on them. Also, the Ulster Unionists will definitely vote for me, after all I have done to bring peace to Ireland.

Saturday

Unfortunately, we didn't quite get enough votes last night, but considering that we are now a minority party we did exceedingly well. Mr Lamont's ridiculous idea of putting VAT on fuel was never a very good one in the first place, and this vote is really a victory for common-sense and shows how right I was to sack him.

Fortunately, I was able to forget about all trivial matters, as I had to play my part on the world stage by flying off to a place called Budapest, which is in Hungary, for a conference to bring peace to Bosnia, which I don't think is in Hungary. Mr Hurd told me on the plane that the conference was called OSCEOD, or possibly it was CODSECO. Anyway, it was a very important meeting and we all reached full agreement on the fact that we could not agree on anything. This was because there were too many countries and there was not enough time. As Mr Hurd said, the conference had been "very helpful" and was "a very significant step forward". Mr Yeltsin shouted something in Russian and fell over, which is obviously the Russian way of saying "we agree".

Monday

My friend Mr Clarke has come up with another brilliant Budget. That is two in one week, which is not inconsiderably impressive. To make up for the money we will not get from VAT on fuel he has decided to put up the prices of cigarettes, petrol and drink. It is a very clever idea. My only question was: "Why did you not do that before?" He replied, quick as a flash: "Because it would have made the Government unpopular."

I had not thought of this, but Mr Clarke as ever had his finger on the pulse.

"Everyone will now blame the rebels for making all their luxuries more expensive," he told me. "They will be the unpopular ones now."

"Oh yes," I said. "We can blame them if we lose the by-election at Dudley this week too."

"Brilliant!" he said. "Have you ever thought of being Prime Minister?" Then he added, with a laugh: "I have."

Tuesday

Today I am sending out Christmas cards to all my friends. My list is rather shorter than last year because I do not send cards to BASTARDS, LOONIES or BARMIES!! Oh no!

I am also seriously considering crossing off my brother Terry. He has sent me Christmas card with a picture of himself and someone called Mariella Frostrup, who is a film star I think. Underneath the picture it reads: "Look what a cracker I've pulled!"

Celebrity has clearly gone to his head and I refuse to put this silly card on the mantelpiece next to my other card (from Jeffrey Archer).

EXCLUSIVE

THOSE GOTT-KGB SECRETS IN FULL

by Our Spectator Staff
C.I.A. Lawson

WE CAN now exclusively reveal the amazing secrets that Soviet superspy Richard Gott passed on to his KGB paymasters from his key position at the heart of the Guardian.

● At the height of the Cuban missile crisis in 1963 Gott sent the following report to the Kremlin:

"There is a new group called The Rolling Stones who are undermining capitalist society by advocating unrestricted hedonism. It is only a matter of time before the glorious day comes."

Gott was rewarded for this highly-prized information by a free lunch at Jimmy's Greek restaurant in Soho.

● At the height of the Vietnam War in 1972, Gott again supplied Stalin with vital intelligence:

"The Tories are back in power. It is a sad day for the proletariat. We must all work harder to overthrow capitalism and its evil works, ie flared trousers and kipper ties which are also in."

Gott was fêted for this by his Russian handlers and given a free subscription to Izvestia.

● At the height of the Falklands War in 1982, from his new post as Guardian Literary Editor, Gott was able to supply full details of the secret Booker shortlist weeks before it was widely available. It included the names of Beverly Whittington, P.F. Drom, Mosinka O'Dinka, Craig Fitte-Pryce, Sharon Jill and Melvyn Bragg.

The last name was a mistake and a furious KGB stripped Gott down to the rank of full Colonel and withdrew his name from the Free Luncheon Voucher List at the Soviet Embassy.

● In the Nineties Gott re-established his pole position as the KGB's top mole during the Gulf War of 1991. At the height of Desert Storm Gott tipped off the Russians that:

"The Guardian has promoted Peter Figgis to Assistant Night Editor (Sports) over the head of the hated Sean Beard thus opening up the possibility of recruiting Figgis, a known SDP supporter, to our cause. Comrade Brezhnev should be delighted that the Guardian is giving a lead once again in the inevitable destruction of the doomed military-industrial complex."

For this Gott was hit over the head by an unknown assailant in a fur hat who said "Take that! You idiot." Peter Preston meanwhile promoted Gott to *(That's enough secrets, Ed).*

GETTING RELIGION BACK INTO CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS FILM HIGHLIGHTS

selected by Bariella Normup

Dick van Dyke *(Jeff)* in the perennial *Mary Archer!*

Christmas Sunday, 3.30 am

CHRISTMAS EVE
BBC1 7.30pm

"Fornicator II" (1984). Sharon Blonde and Arnie Humperdinck are on the run from the Mafia dressed as nuns when they are suddenly transported into the 22nd Century. Watch out for cameo role from Sir Ian McKellen as Krog, Prince of the Thogs. *(170 minutes)*

Star Rating: ****

CHRISTMAS DAY
ITV 9.00am

"Orlando, King of the Gerbils" (1964). Renovated Disney cartoon classic with the voice of Sir John Gielguid as the evil Monty the Moose. Hit songs by Zip Huckleberry and Huck Zippleberry, including "Isn't Life Grand and Dandy?". Glorious kiddies' fun. *(325 minutes)*

Star Rating: Nil

CHRISTMAS DAY
BBC1 3.00pm

"They Ate Their Own Flesh" (1990, Made for TV). Zombie serial killers escape from the future into the quiet Baltimore suburb of New Dworkin. Only an eight-year-old boy (played by MacTruly Disgusting) can save the population from having their innards ripped out and eaten raw for Christmas. Seasonal Family Entertainment.

Star Rating: *****

BOXING DAY
BBC2 11.30am

"The Remains of the Turkey" (1993). Sumptuous Merchant Ivory evocation of an Edwardian Christmas with Sir Anthony Hopkins as the Butler, Travers, who has to clear up the dinner when Lord Branagh (played by Emma Thompson) leaves suddenly for Venice. Don't miss Helena Bonham Carter as the Cranberry Sauce *(surely 'The Honourable Lavinia Redgrave'? Ed).*

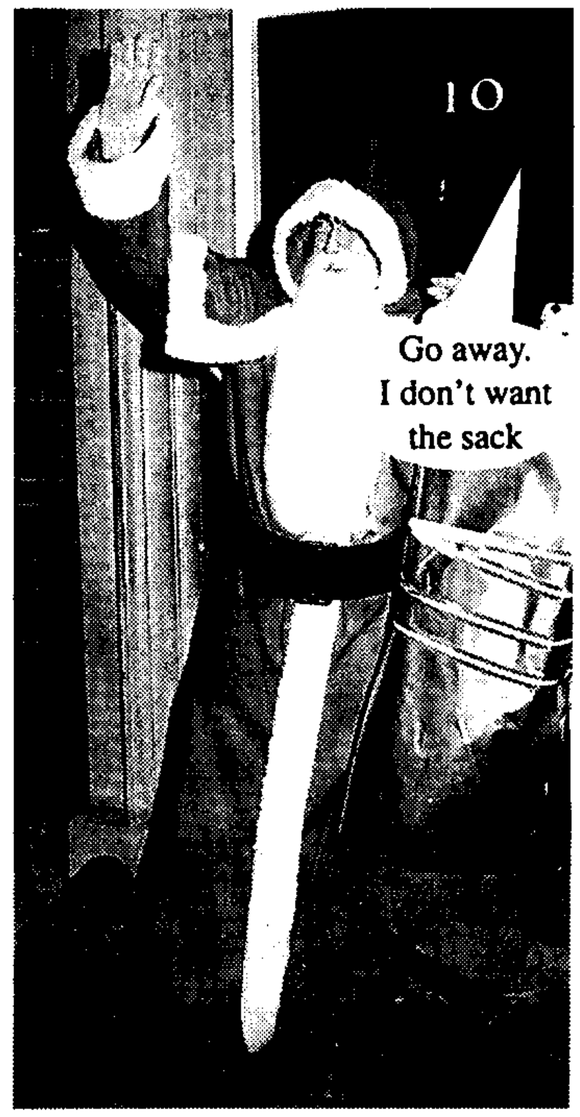
Star Rating: -**

CHRISTMAS TUESDAY
Channel 4 9.00pm

"Passage à Bruges Par Avion" (1994). Low budget black and white Belgian docu-drama by legendary Walloon director Hergé Tintin-Thompson. The story of RAF Squadron 94 which later became famous as the epic wartime thriller "They Flew to Bruges". It spawned a hundred imitations, but this remains the worst of them all *(shurely 'a classic cinematographic triumph'? Ed).*

Star Rating: Go For A Walk

(That's enough films. Ed.)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Sir Herbert Gusset

SIR,—In the light of the recent spell of unnaturally mild weather may I share with your readers what I saw in my garden on December 15th?

To my amazement, I first noticed tulips flowering in the herbaceous border beneath a majestic palm tree which had not been there the night before.

Imagine my surprise when I saw my wife picking avocadoes from the tree which formerly bore crab apples. Walking further into the shrubbery I discovered swallows nesting in the orchids and several pink flamingoes disporting themselves by the ornamental pond which, I have to say, was full of alligators.

I rang my friend, Buffy Frobisher, to see if these freak climatic conditions had replicated themselves in his garden, but I was told by his lady wife that Buffy had sadly been eaten by cannibals earlier that morning.

At this precise moment I heard the first cuckoo of Christmas and decided to take refuge from the ensuing desert sandstorm in the Lamb and Flag, where I remain.

Yours sincerely,
SIR HERBERT GUSSET,
Delirium St. Tremens,
Booker-on-Mail,
Somerset.

A DURBAN stripper who calls herself Brit the Brat says she is planning to launch a political party to fight for the rights of strippers, escorts and prostitutes. She believes that they are not getting a fair crack of the whip

Hotelier & Caterer (S.Africa)

Great Bores Of Today.

"... it was the funniest thing I'd ever seen on television he just came out with it and everyone fell about when I saw it I creased up and you could see everyone at the Awards they were just wetting themselves he's got to be the funniest man ever what was it he said? 'Prince Charles is a bastard' brilliant how old is he now? 80 at least and yet he showed up all those so-called alternative comics they would never dare say something like that brilliant he was one of the original Goons with David Frost and Dudley Moore he was brilliant and he wrote everything you know then he had these mental problems because of the war have you read that Adolf Hitler book? we've got it in the loo at home brilliant the BBC won't touch him nowadays because he's too controversial and there's another side to him of course he's a vegetarian not just a funny man and he cares about the environment and won't be photographed because the film uses up silver nitrate and ruins the ozone level brilliant I've got one of his records from the early days how does it go? 'ying-tong yen-tob ying-tong yen-tob ying-tong tiddle i-po!' something like that brilliant now where's that Karen from Accounts..."

WELL DEBS THANKS VERY MUCH FOR APPEARING ON THE SHOW AND DISCUSSING THE BREAKDOWN OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GARY.
GOOD MORNING
MY PLEASURE.
IT'S A SHAME WE COULDN'T GET GARY TO COME ON AND TALK ABOUT IT AS WELL.
I KNOW.
JUST ONE LAST QUESTION BEFORE YOU GO. WOULD YOU TAKE HIM BACK?
OH YES.
IF SOMEONE GIVES ME A HAND GETTING HIM TO THE CAR.
HOSPITALITY

Mercury COMMUNICATIONS

It's so simple

CSA SWOOP ON ABSENT FATHER

Lapland 25 December

INSPECTORS from the Child Support Agency conducted a lightning swoop this morning on a snow-covered grotto near the North Pole where they served a maintenance order on a Mr Christmas.

Santa Maintenance Clause

They alleged that this man with the long white beard is in fact the father of millions of children round the world.

Said one inspector, Ms Dawn Raid: "This man is a disgrace. He calls himself a father but he only visits them once a year and tries to buy their affection with presents. He never answers their letters and refuses direct contact with them by creeping down the chimney in the middle of the night."

Last night Mr Christmas refused to comment, saying: "Ho ho ho ho ho ho ho!"

In The Saleroom

Winter Scene

Van Frostrup The Elder 1642-1696

Important Works of Art 'Я Us

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GNOME'S XMA

Say Goodbye to Magic Eye Migraine Misery!
with ***The***

Easee-See Book of Pictures

No more going cross-eyed as you try to make sense of a page of blurred colour. Now just open the book and — hey presto! — all your-favourite Magic Eye pictures are there, clear as daylight. Includes:

- *Motorbike*
- *Vase of flowers*
- *Horse*
- *Dinosaur*
- *Mohamed Al-Fayed getting out of his car*

Buy Now & All Around from Your Wedding and a Funeral £27.99

A Times Past Special for The House of Gnome

Mediaeval CD Stacker

COPIED from the original in the Benedictine Abbey at Limoges, this beautifully crafted replica will enhance any home. Finished with Gothic inscription and decorated with fleur-de-lys, it is the ideal container for your "Best of Classic FM" collection.

Holds 400 CDs or 200 CD-ROMs.

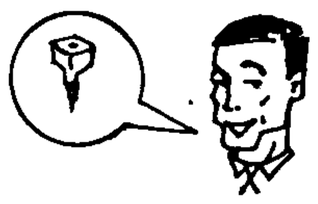
Price £499.99

Plays theme tune from TV's Brother Cadfael series

New from Taiwan

Dent-O-Phone™

A MIRACLE of mobile phone technology married to the latest orthodontic surgery! No need to annoy fellow passengers on Inter-City trains with clumsy, unwieldy receivers! Just talk to yourself! This tiny device looks like a tooth but is actually a micro-mobile-



communication centre with voice activated dialling facility.

Price £49,999.99p

(Answerphone and fax extra)

INTERNET BUFFS!

INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY DRIVING GLOVES

Fashioned from high-quality Gnomex, these ultra-smart all-purpose driving gloves will be the envy of other superhighway motorists! When you put them on and grab your keyboard, you will be in control like never before.

Says the Daily Mail's ***Andrew Neil:*** *"I never travel anywhere without my Information Superhighway Driving Gloves. The girls love them!"*

Price: 99p (plus anorak)

Colours: *Gordon Brown, Rabbi Blue, Cilla Black.*

New Age Worship Accessory

Roddick's Cube

THIS mystical cube, based on an Amazonian lunar calendar, is indispensable as an aid to meditation and self-awareness. The cube, like life itself, can be rearranged into an infinite series of possibilities.

Says TV's Danny ***Baker:*** *"The Roddick's Cube has put me in touch with myself in a very real sense and awakened latent powers of which I was only dimly aware."*

Made from Genuine Tropical Plastic

Price £257.32p

Dog lovers...

DOG ENDS™

■ Ever wondered if your four legged friend might be asking "Why is it only Beagles in laboratories who get to enjoy a satisfying smoke?"

■ Well now, at last, Rover too can have a puff with Britain's First Canine Cigarettes!

■ See the look of pleasure in his eyes as he lights up after his favourite lunch!

Pack of 20: £4.75 + VAT

NEW FROM USA.

By Popular Request!

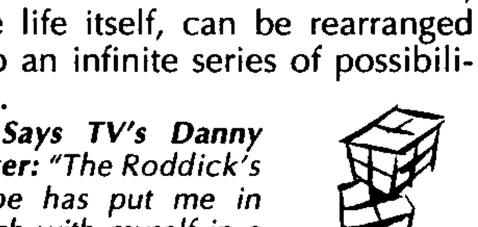
The Mariella Frostrup Novelty Mask

MILLIONS already sold! Fool your friends and family by putting on this totally lifelike mask of 1994's top TV personality! Then wake them up in the middle of the night and say: "Good evening. This is The Little Picture Show". OR just pop into the Sunday Times office and pick up a large cheque!! Amazing!

Price: 3p for box of 100

MEDICATION TAKERS

PILL-O-TALK



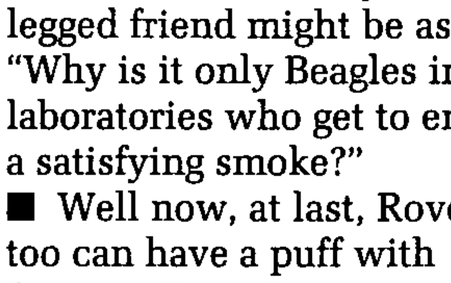
New from the NASA Space Laboratory, the amazing talking pill dispenser!

Looks like any other bottle, but a miniature silicon-chip-powered voice synthesizer tells you the doctor's recommended dosage!

Can be programmed to say *"One, three times a day", "Once before meals", "Not to be taken with alcohol", "Avoid operating heavy machinery", "Go on — take the lot"* etc.

Choice of voices: Dr Finlay, Charlie Fairbrother from TV's Casualty, The Spectator's Theodore Dalrymple.

Price: £199 per month ***(+ connection fees)***



A miracle in your own home!

A religious novelty item from the Philippines

The Weeping Nuns of Foggia

● These tiny porcelain-style figurines actually weep real tears, just like the famous Madonna of Ballyknock. Simply fill with water and stare in wonder as tears stream down their reverend faces!

Price ***(for set of 3 nuns)*****: £4.99**
(water not included)

A Pacific Rim product

Say Goodbye to Multimedia Misery with

MELLOR-SCAN

THIS remarkable new Norwegian laser-based homing ray springs into action whenever David Mellor is about to appear in print or on radio or TV — or even in your wife's bedroom! Mellor-Scan will immediately destroy the offending media source concerned, but leaves the rest of your house miraculously unharmed.

Price: £2.95.

Choice of colours: Chelsea Blue, Tory Blue, Blue Film.

No more Air-Freshener Smell Misery with

PONG GONE™

● ***Fed up with Misty Pine?*** ● ***Cheesed off with Summer Bouquet?*** ● ***And bored with Orchard Fresh?***

Now at last you can neutralise your air-freshened room with this wonder aerosol from Byelorussia!

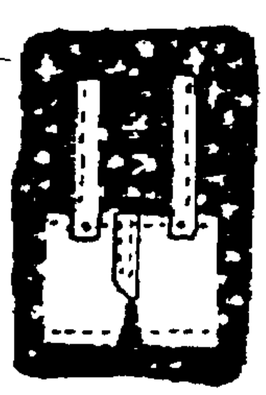
One squirt and mmmm! your smallest room smells just like it did before you sprayed the air-freshener.

Ozone Friendly — EEC Approved
(Do not inhale)

Price: £278.99 ***(100-can pack)***

AS MAILMART

Lottery Lovers



It will be you when you own a pair of

Lucky Tyrolean Lederhosen

For thousands of years the villagers of Unterpantz nestling in the Tyrolean Alps have looked to their ancient lederhosen to bring them good fortune. When worn on the eve of an important occasion such as TV's Gordon and Anthea picking the lottery balls, they guarantee that Lady Luck will smile on the wearer!

Size: S, M, L, XL, Cracker.
Price: £7.50 for pack of 3. Made in UK

NEW FROM MOROCCO!

THE ELECTRO-BROLL

● **NO MORE dripping umbrella misery with the world's first electric self-drying umbrella.**

Electro-Broll is solar-powered, thus generating its own energy in order to dry off unwanted rain residue.

Simply fold down umbrella, switch on and in minutes broll is nice 'n' dry, ready to go out in the rain again!! Ideal for golf, beach, barbecue, etc.

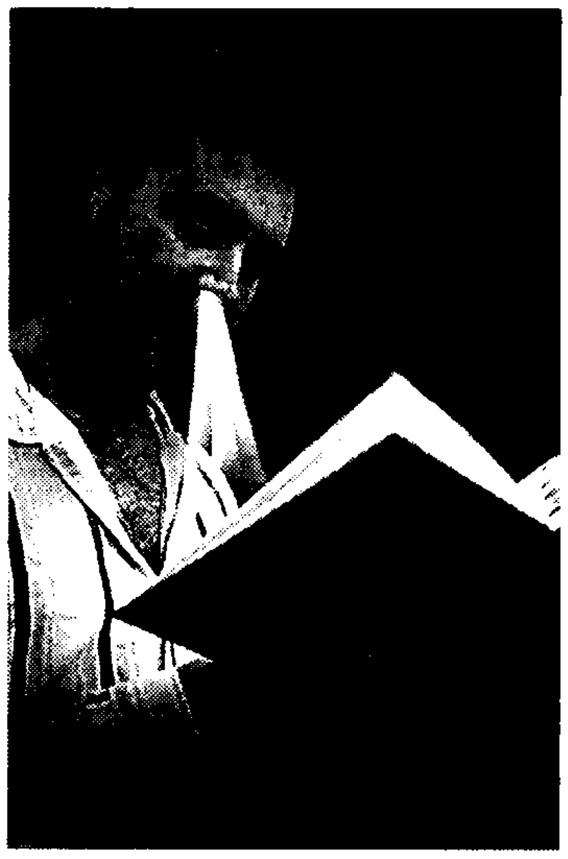
WARNING: Do not use in the wet

Price £148.98
(2 for the price of 3)

Plays theme tune from Harry Enfield and Chums TV show

From Pakistan

LUM-IN-NOSE™



No need to disturb your partner as you read Alan Bennett's Diaries in the middle of the night!

The LUM-IN-NOSE™ ***reading light fits snugly into any size nostrils directing a wide arc of brilliant light onto the book you are reading in bed.***

In no time at all your partner is nice 'n' dozy whilst you read on all night long!

PRICE: 27p (batteries not included)

Say Goodbye to Lost Sock Misery!
With

SPARE-O-SOCK

AT LAST an end to those oh - no - where's - my-other-sock blues! With this brilliant Romanian break-through in pedal technology you will never be a mono-sock victim again!

Packet of two spare socks: £25

Choice of fabrics: *Nylon.*
Choice of colours: *Black*
(Eurosize: 87-327A)

Impress your friends this Christmas!

The GNOME Personalised Card Service

HUNDREDS of Christmas cards delivered to your address from all over the country! Yes, this will convince your partner and loved ones that you are **incredibly** popular! Multiple handwriting and envelope size makes this service totally convincing.

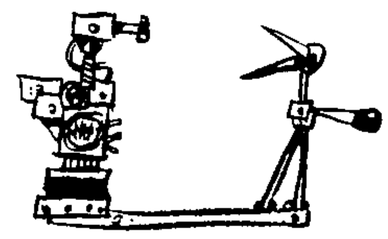
Delivery of 300 cards: £2,728.99p

Individual Price for: ● House of Commons ● Prince Charles ● Mariella Frostrup

NEW FROM CANADA!

The Speak-Your-Height Machine

■ How often have you wondered 'how tall am I today?' Now, at last, thanks to this revolution in altometric technology, you can monitor your height on a day-to-day basis. Simply install in your bathroom or lounge, step on and — hey presto! — within seconds your height is no longer a mystery.



☆ ***Choice of languages:*** *Finnish, Swahili, Yiddish, Walloon, Esperanto. (English version not available at time of going to press.)*

Price: Waterhouse

CENTRAL-LOCKING LOVERS!
No More Dull Bleep Misery thanks to

SING•A•LONG A•LOCK™

✸ **Just press the button and the air fills with your favourite beautiful music as your car unlocks itself!**

Choice of: ♪ **Ravel's Bolero**
♪ **Tippett String Quartet op. 67**
♪ **Britten's War Requiem**

Price £39.99

DOG LOVERS

Pooch-o-Patch

Help Fido give up his filthiest habit with these miracle canine nicotine substitutes from Geneva.

Simply put this incredible patch on your pet's paw and watch him give up smoking for good!

Saves him a fortune and ensures lasting good health!

Price: £75 for pack of ten

Plays theme tune from Don't Forget Your Toothbrush

NEW FROM SWITZERLAND

New from North Korea

The Stereo TROUSER PRESS XB72

☆ **At last the world's first dual trouser press, guaranteed to press an incredible 2 pairs of trousers at the same time!**

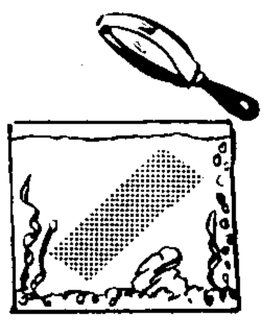
✽ Simply take off both your pairs of trousers and the amazing Stereo Trouser Press XB72 does the rest! In less than 2 weeks. No wires, no batteries, no trousers.

● **£377.77 + VAT** ●

"My trousers have never been so well pressed", **says Radio 3's SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE**

New from the Maldives

INVISIBLE TROPICAL FISH



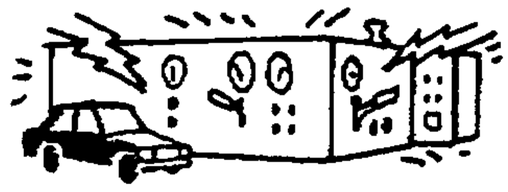
Tank of 200 fish: £3,888.87p
(As not seen on BBC2)

● Tropical fish lovers will adore these exotic invisible fish from the Iannuci Ocean. Some of them are as tiny as pinheads and others are larger than elephants — yet so clever are these remarkable creatures at the art of camouflage that even Sir David Attenborough has never seen them!

Nostalgia Enthusiasts

You've got the '30s telephone, the '40s wireless – NOW the 1950s

HOME COMPUTER



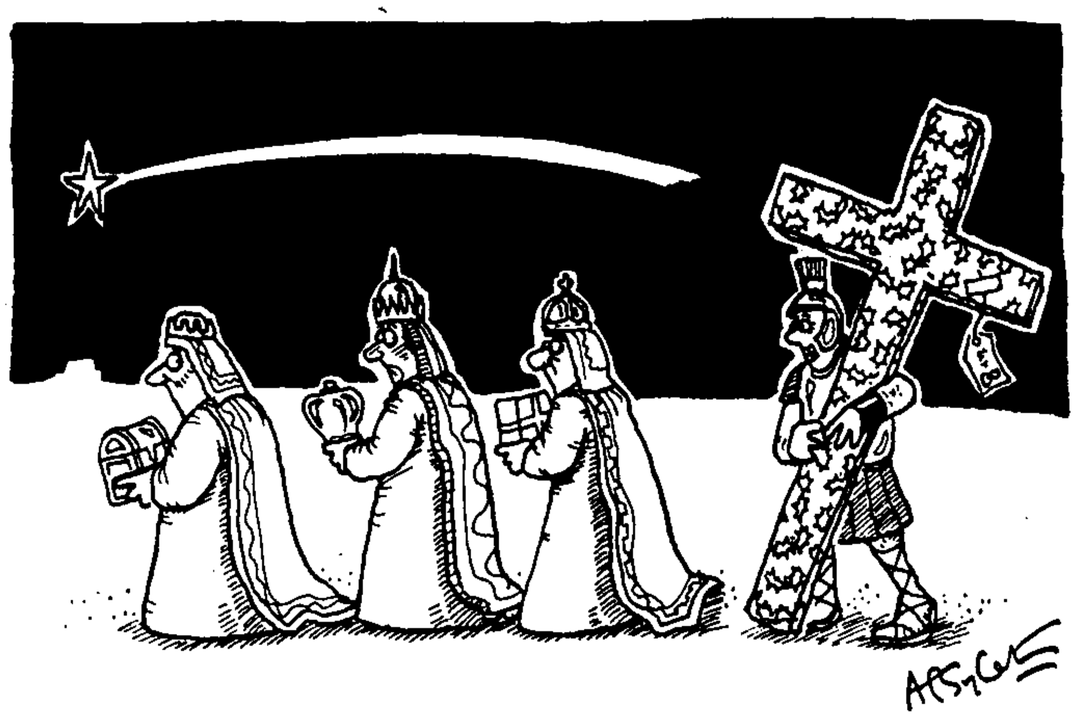
JUST like in an old black and white film (e.g. *Day of the Giant Gerbil*), **this totally authentic ex-Government mainframe computer is actually the size of the average home! (378,000 cubic feet, without batteries.)**

Comes with miles of cables, thousands of valves and millions of red flashing lights.

☆ The hum is deafening!

☆ ***Hours of fun (literally) as it adds two and two together to make seven!***

Price: £125 million *Colours: Grey*



COMMUNITY CARE — STORM OVER NEW THREAT TO PUBLIC SAFETY

by Our Mental Health Correspondent
Charles Broadmoor

A POTENTIAL disaster came to light last night when it emerged that, after the next election, hundreds of Tory MPs may be released into the community without any means of support.

"It is a time bomb waiting to explode," said psychiatrist Dr Anthony Clare de Lunatic. "Anything up to 315 of these very dangerous men and women will be let loose all at once, without supervision and without any sense of social responsibility."

MPs Be With You

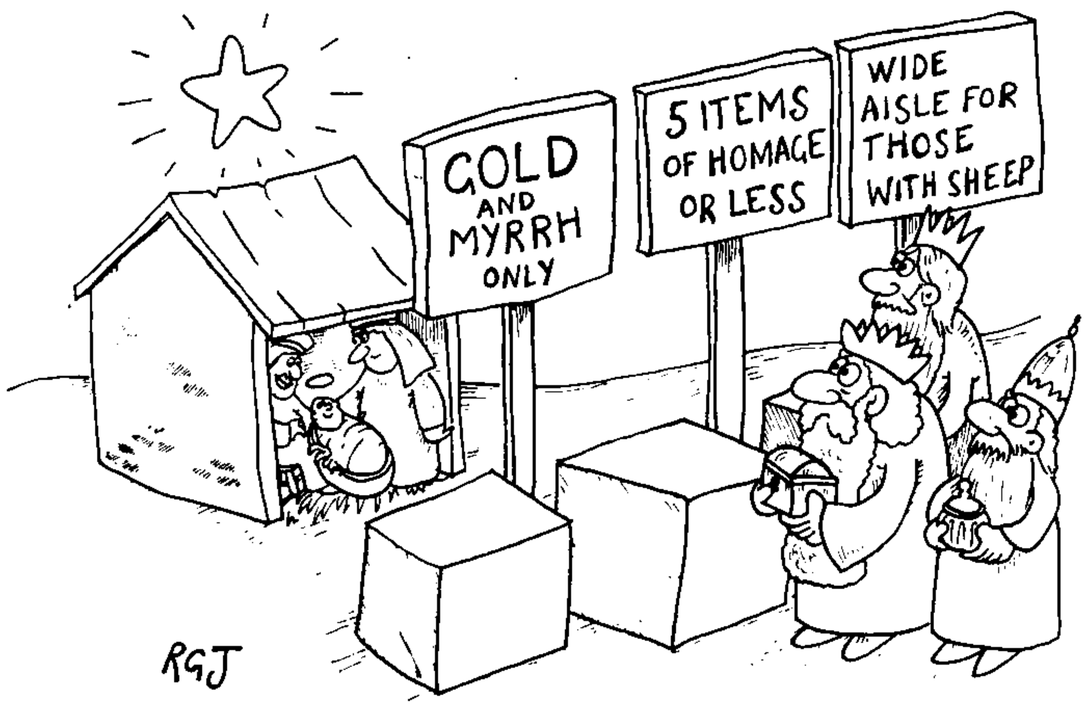
"In many cases," the doctor went on, "their families have totally given up on them, owing to their compulsive urge to tell lies and engage in sexual promiscuity, and their complete lack of any moral scruples.

"They will stop at nothing to get their hands on money to feed their addictions to large lunches, trips abroad and appearing on TV.

"Up until now," the doctor concluded, "these unfortunate people have been isolated in the relative security of a large Victorian institution on the banks of the Thames, guarded by hundreds of uniformed police.

"But now they are to be unceremoniously tossed out, with no hope of finding employment. Who knows what will happen to them?"

David Mellor is 95.8KHz.



HURD AND MAJOR

(Silly music. Hurd is hanging Christmas decorations, while Bertie Major strums piano and sings... "My old man says follow the VAT..." He breaks off, looking puzzled)

Major: I say, Hurd, these Serb johnnies seem to be getting a bit restive, trampling over jolly old Bihac and generally cocking a snook at brother UNPROFOR.

Hurd: Sir seems to be unusually well informed this morning. I hope sir isn't feeling unwell.

Major: Heard it on the wireless. Jolly useful gadget.

Hurd: Indeed sir. I am sure Mr Birt would be most gratified by your sentiment, dedicated as he is to his "mission to inform".

Major: Well kindly inform *me*, Hurd, as to why we seem to be making such a bally hash of things. I thought we were meant to be waving the big stick and keeping friend Serb cowering in his bunker while our chaps buzz around overhead zapping them with the odd bomberooni, eh what?

Hurd: Indeed a colourful scenario, sir. But sadly, as so often is the case, the realities of the situation are more complicated.

Major: Come again, Hurd?

Hurd: If we take punitive action against the supporters of Mr Karadicz, sir, they might well feel disposed to retaliate against our own soldiers.

Major: Well, can't out chaps just jolly well shoot back, Hurd?

Hurd: Oh no, sir. Our men are not allowed to fight. They are only there to keep the peace.

Major: Then why did we send soldiers in the first place — why not just a load of lollipop ladies to dish out the soup?

Hurd: I don't think, sir, that flippancy is appropriate, given the very unhappy plight of the poor Bosnians.

Major *(chastened):* Well, if you're so clever, Hurd, with all that fish you eat, what's your plan for getting us out of this mess?

Hurd: The time has come, sir, when we must draw a firm line. We must issue an ultimatum to Mr Milosevic and his friends.

Major: You mean, Hurd, we're going to get really tough at last?

Hurd: I fear so, sir. There is no alternative, as you will recall your Aunt Magatha was fond of remarking.

Major: Jolly good. So, what do we tell them?

Hurd: I suggest, sir, that we issue the strongest possible warning to the Serbs that, unless they agree to our peace plans, we will take all our soldiers home and leave them to sort it out for themselves.

Major: Gosh, Hurd, that is a really top-hole solution to the whole bally problem.

Hurd: I always endeavour to give service, sir.

(Major returns to piano and sings: "If you were the only Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the world...")

To miss-spell someone's given name is slack and impolite/My name is PETA SANDARS. For Pete's sake – GET IT RIGHT!!!

Petra Sandars
1 Pineview Cottages
Seale Lane

Mensa magazine

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1994
32p

FEMAIL Magazine
PAGES 35-52

LABOUR'S ROYAL DEATH LIST EXCLUSIVE

By Our Political Staff PETER VOTE-TORY

THE LABOUR Party, we can reveal, has a secret agenda to assassinate the top members of the Royal Family as soon as they come to power.

In a document found inside the imagination of our editor, Mr Tony Blair reveals that he and his wife Cheri will personally supervise the mass execution of the House of Windsor.

How they will go under Labour

PRINCE PHILIP . . . . A Riding Accident
THE QUEEN . . . . . Another Mystery Fire
QUEEN MUM . . . . . A Fishbone Incident
PRINCE CHARLES . . . . Assassinated by Crazed Architect
PRINCESS DI . . . . . Eating Disorder
WILLS & HARRY . Smothered in Tower of London by the evil Robin Cook *(Don't overdo it, Ed.)*

LATE NEWS

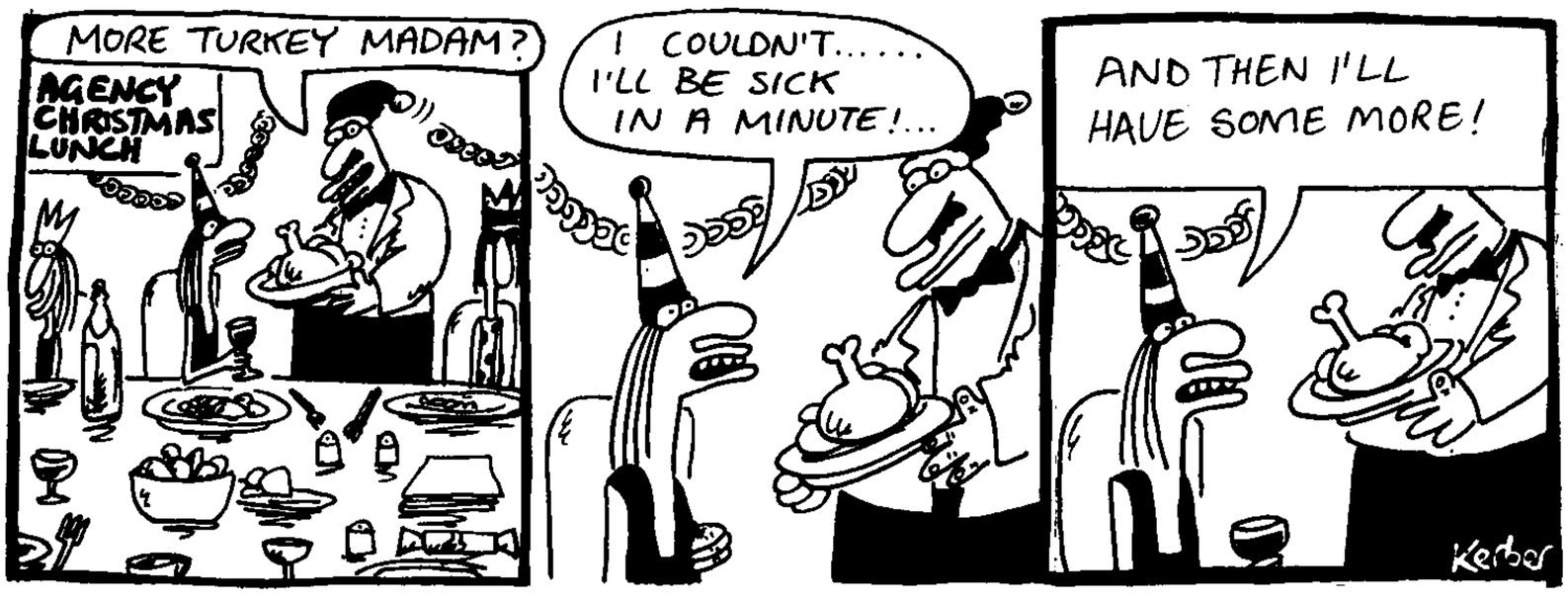
Prince Charles Calls For 'Scaled Down Labour Party'

THE PRINCE of Wales has launched a devastating attack on the Labour Party, saying it should be used only for ceremonial occasions. "Let's face it," he said, "they no longer have any political power and should only be wheeled out for events such as the opening of Parliament and Breakfast with Frost."

Charles continued: "That man with the funny ears must find himself a role in life rather than wandering about making speeches about things he knows nothing about".

SUPERMODELS

Neil Kerber



JUST FANCY THAT

Greater Manchester Police is determined to stamp out racial harassment and abuse.

Manchester Evening News (14/11/94)

POLICE search black people almost twice as often as whites on the streets of Greater Manchester.

Manchester Evening News (14/11/94)

DIARY

SUZANNE MOORE'S HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Like hell it is. Is it really appropriate within this culture of ours in which rabid commercialism is disseminating its entrails into every last corner of our so-called lives that we should still refer to the season or seasons of Christmas as "happy"? I wasn't born yesterday, love.

Whichever way you look at it, and believe me I have, Christmas is a male-dominated, male-invented, male-order institution desined to reassert the power and prestige of those in our society with dangly bits between their legs and that doesn't mean me or us. No one can deny that if you take the second letter and the fourth letter and the fifth letter out of cHrIStmas you get the word HIS, so surely I can't be the only one to feel offended by it or is that asking too much of a culture reeling under the impact of fifteen years of the Conservative jackboot? Hardly.

I could do with a bit of gold, and I suppose I could just about manage some frankincense. But Myrrh? Not myrrh-y likely, mate. I wouldn't want a bucketful of myrrh if you left it on my doorstep and paid me five hundred quid to take it off your hands. Myrrh? Myeugh, more like.

Happy? Try telling that to the turkey that's just been trussed and stuffed and placed in the oven at a low temperature for ten gruelling hours. Try telling that to the brussel sprout that until yesterday was hanging on its tree without a care in the world but is now being skinned and slashed and placed in boiling water, leaving her family without any form a matriarchal brussels sprout as a role-model. The fact of the matter is that there's nothing more upsetting than giving or receiving presents. As Jacques Quacque points out in his seminal work, *The Myth of Human Joy* (1987), the giving of a present is a classic way by which supremacy can be and is and continues to be asserted in our materialistic society, and that's my point. And the whole point about my point is that the point I am making has a larger point, which is that the point is unwrapping a present is the same in the mind of your average man as undressing a woman and must thus be wholly discouraged. And another thing. The last time I was given a "present" (and inevitably, guess who was left to unwrap the damn thing? Right first time: moi) it turned out to be something I didn't want. Typical, and yet another example of the crass 'You-scratch-my-back-but-I'll-be-damned-if-I'll -scratch-yours' society we have created for ourselves. No wonder the National Health Service is in decline, and millions of innocent women are starving in Ethiopia. So much for the "triumph" (note the inverted commas) of Goose Green. Still happy, then?

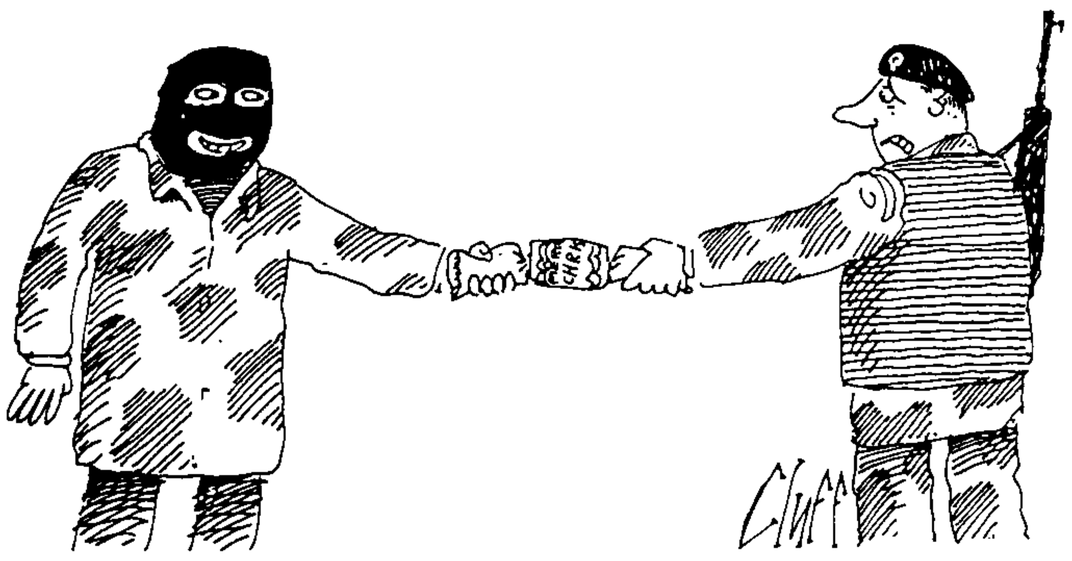
Could someone please tell me pretty damn urgently, why should the holly bear the throne? What's the holly done to deserve it? Paid the odd tenner into the Tory party's secret coffers, no doubt. Arise, Lord Holly, and all that. Meanwhile, the poor bloody ivy — having slogged her damn guts out to get into that carol in the first place — is just simply forgotten by the third verse, banished and neglected so that Holly can reap the dividends of brutal triumphalism. Some Christmas that proved to be for Ivy, eh?

So, it's official. Christmas is once again to be on December 25th. The obscenity of this fact is that last year it was on December 25th, and the year before that, and the year before that, and it's been on December 25th for as long as most of us can remember. It gets on my wick. But did anyone ask us when we wanted it to be? Like as heck they did. Yet when have you ever seen it questioned? Right first time; never. There are more ways to gag someone than putting a gag around their mouth. You can use a hankie, for one. But more puzzling to me than trying to get inside the sick minds of those who place Christmas on exactly the same day every single bloody year and what frankly really scares the hell out of me is trying to understand how the psychological traumas of post-colonial oppression have contributed ipso facto to sentences in our mass media that go on for a very long time and, while paying lip-service to strands of right-on thought such as multi-culturalism, the information superhighway, the corruption inherent in public life and the place of woman's role in society today somehow come to an end without really getting anywhere so that you are left wondering five minutes later what exactly all that was about even though they are followed by punchy, slangy two-word sentences. 'Nuff said.

In this current climate that seeks to airbrush away all diversity of opinion, is it really appropriate to pull Christmas crackers, to sing songs, to "make merry" and to generally "have a good time"? Try telling that to Michael Jackson this Christmas, who we as a society have forced into a mythological straitjacket of seminal iconography, hoping this god/man/child we have entrapped in a celebrity of our own making can begin to explain us to ourselves, even though he has never yet been allowed by us to understand the self that is him. I think it was Roland Barthes who once said something about this sort of thing.

And we as a society killed Marilyn Monroe and Jimi Hendrix and Diana Ross, all within the twelve months leading up to Christmas. And if Diana Ross is still alive, that's only because she's not yet dead.

You know, I sometimes feel an overwhelming sense of isolation when I look at the fairy on top of the christmas tree, this dumb kid in a tutu sitting astride this huge phallic symbol while beneath her the family unit bickers, strains, fights and crumbles. Ding Dong Merrily On High I don't think - Ding Dong *UN*merrily on High, more like!!! Meanwhile — FACT: every present we give our children only serves to make then sadder. Like, last Christmas in an effort to avoid the crass commercialism that is the Festive Season I decided to carve my child an eco-friendly toy bracelet out of an (organic) raw carrot. As she took it out of its box, I waited for her smiles of joy. Instead, she burst into tears, yet another example of one of society's Christmas victims, pressured by her peer group into cracking up under the fierce whip of institutionalised merriment. So, this Christmas, I'm going to keep it simple and make it an essentially creative process by letting my child carve her own (organic) raw carrot, so at least she'll be able to extract a little personal happiness from the whole present-giving bourgeois socialisation process. Have a Happy Christmas everyone, if you must.



JUST FANCY THAT

A much-vaunted film of his life was cancelled shortly before the first guests arrived at Alexandra Palace, north London.

The Times (3/12/94)

Inside the palace in north London last night, 500 guests were treated to a short film depicting the life of the Secretary of State for Employment

The Independent (3/12/94)

A reliable widow cleaning service at affordable prices is offered by Adrian and Brian Turner. Theirs is a family business established for over 15 years which can show local references.

Ashburnham & Penhurst Church News

Literary Review

Book scratching

BURCHILL has spoken. Reviewing the book of the year, *Lord Gnome's Literary Companion* (Verso, £18.95) in the *Spectator*, she declares that: "No one is interested in Book of the Year lists except other writers." She doesn't believe anybody has ever bought a book on her recommendation. "No, these lists have become just another way we send the season's greetings to our friends."

Just so — but that's precisely the interest, isn't it, sweetheart? Although every year one or two rank amateurs commit the embarrassing faux pas of trying to remember which book it was they actually liked best, nobody holds it against them. They'll learn. The point of these little gatherings is pretty obvious: a chance to clock who's in, who's out, who's still friends, who's not.

Most book of the year choices are nothing but good manners, as a little research soon shows. In 1990, for example, Ian McEwan's choice happened to be his pal "Craig Raine's distinguished, wilful collection of essays *Haydn and the Valve Trumpet*". In 1992, Craig Raine in turn loyally chose his old mucker Ian McEwan's novel *Black Dogs*.

This year, lest auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind, it was Ian's go again. As luck would have it, his "pick of the publishing year" for the *FT* was, wait for it, nothing other than Craig Raine's *History: The Home Movie*. "Language is wrought into a kind of mental jewellery," he said. Well, it would be, wouldn't it? Bangles and brooches, probably.

Craig Raine has other friends too, though. In the *TLS* he selected as his book of the year Timothy Garton Ash's *In Europe's Name*, commenting gracefully: "Garton Ash is an historian with the ability to raise meticulousness to the level of art." A jolly nice Christmas gift. But you know how embarrassing it is when you take somebody a present and they haven't got you one, or vice versa? Luckily that hasn't happened here! In the very same pages, Garton Ash had quite correctly chosen Craig Raine's *History: The Home Movie*. "Raine, with his incurably English — that is, empirical — intelligence, finds truth hidden in the details between history's skirts," he said. And, as anybody who knows our Craig could add, probably right up her bottom too.

But then they're a surprisingly saucy lot at the *TLS*. Not much else to do perhaps? Galen Strawson, for example, nominated a *TLS* colleague in these words in the *Independent on Sunday*: "For outstanding penetration I recommend *The Folding Star* by Alan Hollinghurst." Big Al can only be flattered, surely.

At this special time of year, it's heartwarming seeing people making friends, though, isn't it? Will Self, for example, managed to focus just long enough to include Carlo Gebler's *The Cure* in his selection for the *Sindie*, calling it "a harrowing trip into superstition and madness that was as involving as anything I read on Irish history and culture". And few people, he had no need to add, know more about harrowing trips than him.

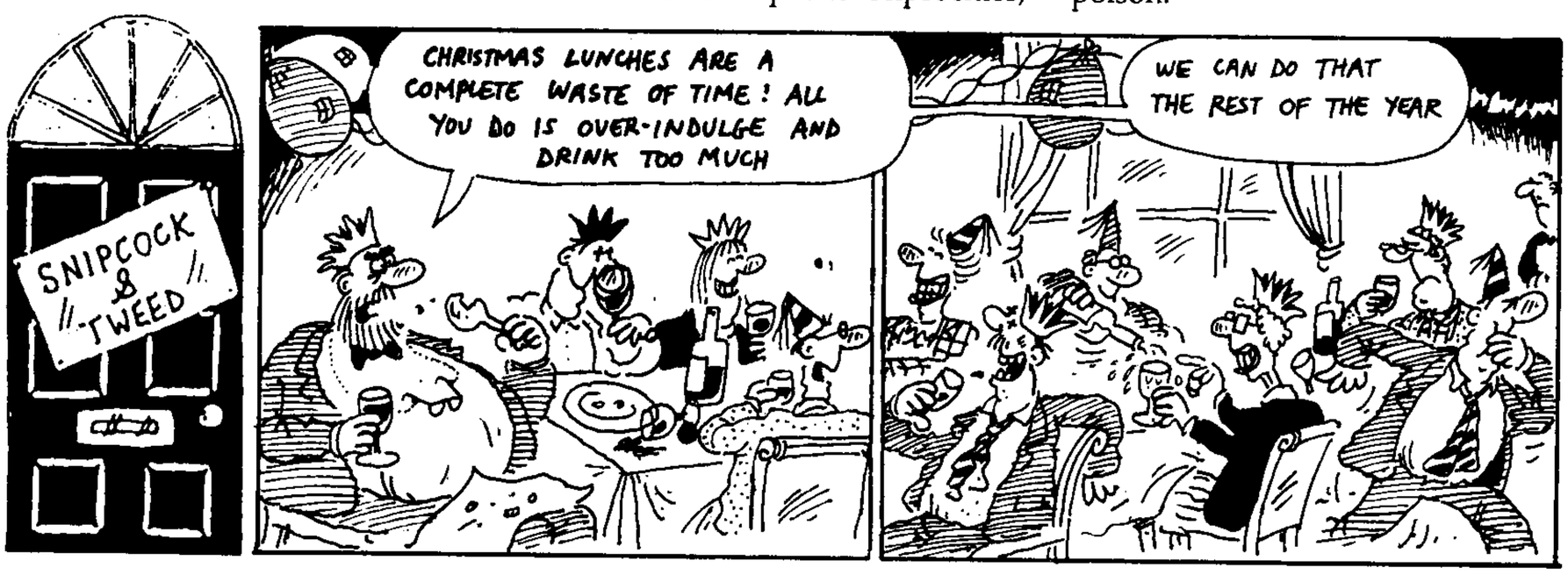
By a really spiffy coincidence, Carlo Gebler returned the favour, choosing Will self's *The Grey Area* in the *FT*, describing it as "a chilling moral diagnosis of all that is wrong with our society". *All*? Well, if you say so.

After such exquisite reciprocities, mere pushing and shoving, fondling and fawning, is hardly worth noticing, is it? It'd be like complaining that lots of the people at this office party seem to know each other. Besides, there are so many reasons other than mere acquaintanceship, or sharing publishers, agents or postal districts, for pushing a book. Gays choose books by gays, Tories by Tories, lefties by lefties, frogs by frogs, and toads by toads. For instance, a little gang of trolls chose Eric Hobsbawm's apologia for communism, *Age of Extremes*: it doesn't mean they've read it, just that they've heard somewhere it's on their side.

The most often cited book this year, with 18 kissy-kissies, was *Writing Home*, Alan Bennett's much-luvvied collection, probably because even those who hadn't actually read it hadn't been able to escape all the serialisations and radio-readings. Close behind, boasting 17 salutations, came Selina Hastings for her worthy biography of *Evelyn Waugh*. Again, no doubt even those who haven't got too far with it remember vaguely how the story ends.

The most popular novel was Hollinghurst's gay puzzler with eight votes, Hilary Mantel coming hot on his tail with seven supporters for *A Change of Climate*. The Booker winner Kelman got just one vote, from his dogged compatriot Harry Ritchie.

The other volumes most mentioned were Claire Tomalin's *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, Doris Lessing's memoirs *Under My Skin*, Craig Raine's guff and Hobsbawm's poison.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
CHRISTMAS LUNCHES ARE A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME! ALL YOU DO IS OVER-INDULGE AND DRINK TOO MUCH
WE CAN DO THAT THE REST OF THE YEAR

"Good morning! Can I interest you in the Encyclopedia of Forbidden Knowledge?"

The most honest and tragic selection came from poor Zoe Heller. She named *The Art of Makeup* by Kevyn Aucoin. "Fab beauty tips, easy-to-follow instructions plus lots of super pix," she enthused, desperately. Still, at least she's probably read it.

Most are not so dutiful. One of last year's most nominated books was *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* by Roberto Calasso. Lots of people thought it looked like a smart title to flourish. This year it came out in paperback and they finally opened it up, only to find it pitiful bilge. You just can't trust anybody these days, can you?

Books & Bookmen

■ *THE position of writer-in-residence at the University of East Anglia attracted some high calibre candidates. Tibor Fischer, shortlisted for last year's Booker, and Sarah Maguire and John Burnside, New Generation poets, all went for the post.*

But the surprise winner was Carole Morin — a relative unknown with only one novel to her name. Her appointment will have delighted at least one member of the selection panel, however — Don Watson, the literature officer of Eastern Arts, who knows Ms Morin via their shared interest in being married to one another.

One can only hazard a guess at what else Watson will give his missus for Christmas this year: in 1992 he was chairman of a committee that awarded Carole Morin a bursary to pay for a month in Ireland to work on her new book. And last year his festive gift was a grant of more than £1,000 to enable her to, er, work on her new book.

PS: Fans are still awaiting the new Morin classic.

□ **CONTRARY to Bookworm's suggestion in the last *Eye*, Faber *is* still waiting for the warts and all biography of John Birt by *Observer* TV critic and don, John Naughton.**

Indeed ff is very eager for it: Naughton has missed four delivery dates so far — the latest one is this Christmas — and if he doesn't deliver this time ff wants its money back.

Strangely, each time Naughton's deadlines have come and gone in the past the same story has popped up, suggesting the book's non-appearance has something to do with Phyllis — aka P.D. James, who is published by ff — being an influential BBC governor who has threatened to take her detective stories elsewhere out of loyalty to Birt.

In fact Phyliss is no longer a BBC governor and the story is beginning to look as if it should be on the fiction list.

'Bookworm'

footnotes

MAIL DOMINATION

WHEN is a media monopoly not a media monopoly? When it supports the government. Final proof of this ancient adage has emerged from the office of Tim Eggar, the Minister for Safeguarding the Public from Monopolies.

Eggar has been studying the recent report of the monopolies and mergers commission (MMC) into the proposal by the Daily Mail and General Trust to buy T. Bailey Forman, which publishes the only daily paper in Nottingham, the *Nottingham Evening Post*. From first to last, the report is a devastating attack on the proposal.

The Daily Mail Trust owns Northcliffe newspapers, the second largest UK publisher of local newspapers. "If the merger were to take place," says the commission, "Northcliffe would have a monopoly of the daily newspapers published in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Humberside and the northern part of Staffordshire. This represents a very significant area across the centre of England which covers some 8,000 square miles and includes a population of about 4.75 million."

The Mail's share in the sale of local newspapers in the East Midlands triangle would rise from 36 per cent to a staggering 58 per cent, far past the margin which normally denotes a monopoly. On and on went the argument against the merger. It would restrict the choice of newspaper for almost all the public in the area, slash the diversity of opinion and news and concentrate still further the enormous power of the Daily Mail group.

"The group will require its editors to conform to general editorial standards set by Northcliffe," predicted the commission. There would be no improvements in efficiency and certainly no extra jobs. "We have found no benefits arising from the transaction which are sufficient to outweigh the detriments. We therefore conclude that the proposed transfers may be expected to operate against the public interest."

Such strong language from the normally compliant MMC shocked Mr Eggar and his government. The *Daily Mail* and its associated titles have for many months been showing ominous signs of disloyalty to the Tory government, and especially to John Major. If the trust were refused its booty in the East Midlands, might not this harden the resolve of proprietor Lord Rothermere and editor-in-chief David English to push Major over the edge and try their luck with nice Mr Blair? Surely there must be room for compromise?

Unfortunately the prospect of a compromise had been closely investigated by the commission — and ruled out by the *Mail's* greed. "We considered," the commissioners reported, "whether any conditions could be attached... Since diversity of opinion can only be adequately protected if the *Nottingham Evening Post* is not in the same ownership as the daily evening newspapers in Derby and Leicester, any condition would have to involve divestment of one or both of these titles. The Daily Mail and General Trust rejected this out of hand."

EGGAR CAN BE CHOOSER:
The minister of trade (above) and his admirers, Lord Rothermere (left) and Sir David English

It seemed like an impasse. But nothing is beyond the agility of Michael Heseltine and his sidekick Tim Eggar when it comes to safeguarding their support in the Tory press. Eggar generously gave the *Mail* until 5 December to negotiate with the DTI. In the nick of time, the impossible compromise was found to be possible after all.

Had the Mail agreed after all, in exchange for the Nottingham paper, to sell the *Leicester Evening Mercury* (circn: 100,000) or the *Derby Evening Telegraph* (circn: 70,000) — the very minimum condition demanded by the commission to prevent a monopoly in the area? Not at all. It agreed instead to sell the *Long Eaton Advertiser* incorporating the *Stapleford and Sandiacre News* whose combined circulation is 7,892.

The *Mail* promised a board of selected dignitaries "to maintain editorial independence on the *Nottingham Evening Post*" and gave the usual meaningless assurances not to prevent or distort competition.

A marvellous symmetry was established. The Daily Mail and General Trust gobbled up another profitable local newspaper and established an impregnable monopoly across half of middle England. Two fingers were raised the monopolies commission — and the time-honoured association between the Tory party and its favourite daily newspaper stable was restored to its former glory.

OUTLAWED JOSIE

■ **PARKSIDE HEALTH, one of the country's biggest "community care trusts" with seven hospitals and 26 health centres in central and north-west London, is desperately short of staff.**

But the shortage has not deterred trust mandarins from suspending an experienced and popular health visitor for the following very serious offences at work:

1) Singing snatches of hymns.

2) Wearing sandals or (worse) high-heeled shoes.

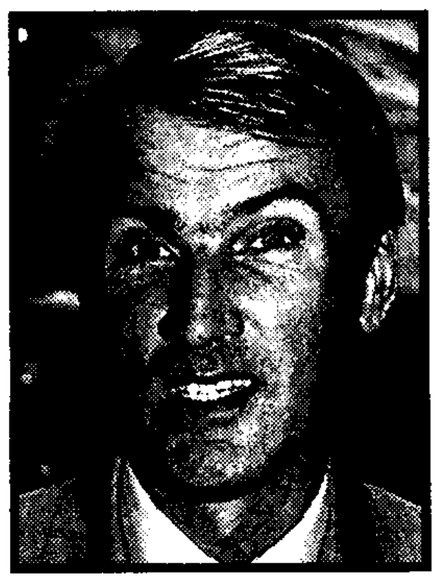
3) Falling over by accident.

These obviously intolerable offences have, it is alleged, all been committed by Josie Siddique, a health visitor at the hideously overcrowded and understaffed Mortimer Road Clinic in Kensal Green. She has been officially warned about the hymn-singing and the sandals, which she swapped for high-heeled shoes, only to get another warning for them as well. On 20 October, a child ran at her in the clinic. She swerved, missed the child but fell to the ground. For this "incident" she was promptly suspended and now faces disciplinary proceedings which could end in the sack.

The Health Visitors Association is angry. It says Josie Siddique has for years annoyed the proud bureaucrats who run the trust with persistent powerfully-written complaints about cuts and understaffing at the clinic. The HVA points to a steady stream of suspensions and sackings all over the country of devoted and highly-qualified staff who have had the nerve to complain about what they regard as the steady destruction of the national health service.

PS: Parkside Health was singled out by Virginia Bottomley in August for being "in the forefront of innovation and radical change".

Handy Andy



■ **WHENEVER more bad news emerges about the affairs of Robert Maxwell, government whips tend to raise a cheer and remind everyone that Maxwell was once a Labour MP.**

There was no noticeable celebration from that quarter, however, when it was announced that a subsidiary of Morgan Grenfell merchant bank has been fined £180,000 by the regulator IMRO — the third largest such fine ever imposed.

The bank had "inadvertently" and without permission from the trustees shifted a few hundred thousand pounds worth of assets from a pension fund once owned by Maxwell. This happened in February 1989, not long after Morgan Grenfell recruited to its team the bright young Tory MP for Berkshire East, Andrew MacKay.

In a glowing tribute, circulated in 1988 to all staff, Morgan Grenfell director David Douglas Home said it was "no small credit" to the MP that "we have recovered our political acceptability in Westminster and Whitehall". The tribute went on: "Many companies underestimate how much their MP can do for them... I think we all ought to give some thought and discuss with our clients how Andrew can assist us."

Helpfully, Mr MacKay visited the bank's head office every month. And he went on assisting (and being paid by) Morgan Grenfell until the general election, after which he was promoted to the whips' office, where he is now junior whip.

GUESS WHO BENEFITS!

THERE follows an everyday story of privatising folk, and their deep concern that their behaviour should be subject to public scrutiny.

Earlier this year the Benefits Agency, which handles all benefits for the department of social security (DSS), privatised the publishing of the vast amounts of government literature which tell people about their social security benefits. The lucky new company, Benefits Agency Publishing Ltd, promptly set up its headquarters in glamorous offices in Leeds.

The company has three directors: Phil Geeney; Frank Sumnall; and Ian Southall, all of whom worked as civil servants for the Benefits Agency.

In issue 19 of *Market Testing*, the DSS's circular about the privatisation, Mr Geeney wrote an enthusiastic account of how he and his colleagues had won the tender. The account was challenged by a letter in the next issue of *Market Testing* which revealed that Mr Geeney's management buy-out had knocked out another in-house bid involving many more former staff. This other in-house bid had been drawn up by, er, a Mr Philip Geeney, who had "managed to submit a higher cost bid than for his own management buy-out bid".

The letter also referred to the shareholding in the new company. Of a total of 10,000 shares, Geeney has 1,799, Sumnall 1,799 and Southall 1,800. The *Market Testing* letter alleged that these shares had been "offered" to the three directors at £1 each. It also alleged that the company was worth £4.2 million, which suggests that the shares could be worth as much as £420 each. The letter ended: "Although three directors cannot sell their shares during the course of the first contract, they are free to do so after then. Some politicians have remarked on the sleaze factor of privatisation. Could using a privileged position as a civil servant in order to gain commercial advantage, albeit legally, be what they had in mind?"

The *Eye* asked the Benefits Agency about the allegation that Mr Geeney had submitted a higher bid for the in-house bid than for his own management buy-out. The agency replied: "The competitiveness of the in-house option was scrutinised and validated by an independent consultant." Moreover: "The agency has ensured that the company's growth will result in a return to the taxpayer."

And what about the shares? The agency said: "Share ownership is a matter for the private company."

On 22 November, the *Eye* asked Mr Geeney:

- What would you say was the current value of the shares?
- Do you three directors expect to make a substantial profit on the shares when you sell them?
- If so, how do you answer the charge that you will be profiting from what used to be a public service?

The *Eye* also asked about a recent loan to the company from the Bank of Ireland, secured on the directors' key life insurance policies. A few days later, the *Eye* received a courteous call from a Mr Ronel Lehmann, of west London, who said his firm did public relations for Benefits Agency Publishing. "It will take a little time to answer these questions," said Mr Lehmann, who promised to respond within a fortnight.

On 7 December he wrote to the *Eye* as follows:

"I refer to our recent telephone conversation in respect of your letter dated 22 November addressed to Mr Phil Geeney. I have since been advised that the firm is bound by contract not to publish, reproduce, arrange press releases or make any public statements whatsoever."

A Mans for all windows

■ WHAT a rotten time it's been for Keith Mans, debonair Tory MP for Wyre, near Blackpool.

First there was all that dreadful publicity about his acting for the lobbyist Ian Greer and putting in a good word for the tobacco industry, even though he's PPS to Virginia Bottomley at the department of health.

Now comes bad news from his constituency, where a firm called Mr Windows (Lancs) has recently gone into receivership owing £300,000, much of it to the government.

Many in Wyre still remember Mr Mans's handsome face (see picture – far right)in the local paper in December 1990 opening a factory extension for Mr Windows. The proprietor of Mr Windows, also in the picture (second from right), was Gordon Hinchliffe. Hinchliffe's previous firm, Gardinia Windows, hadn't done very well either. Despite the generous paid help of a local Labour councillor, that firm too had gone into receivership, owing £600,000. One problem appeared to have been Mr Hinchliffe's lavish life style, which included two Mercedes cars and a mansion.

Mr Mans explained his decision to open the factory extension by saying he was "doing something for the area". Mr Hinchliffe, who is a pillar of the local church, the local masonic lodge and the local Rotary club, was more abrupt. "Having an MP," he said, "is good PR."

Yes! We have no bananas
(or anything else for that matter)

■ WHEN Labour MP John McAllion asked for examples of contracted out services in government departments where there had been an "identifiable improvement in the quality of service provided", Robert Hughes, of the Duchy of Lancaster's department, replied swiftly with a long list.

It included "catering" at the central office of information (COI) — an example that surprised 500 COI staff at Hercules House, who for the last three months have had no catering facilities at all.

Their canteen had been "contracted out" to Gardner Merchant, which provided such a rich variety of enticing cheap and popular food... that the canteen was closed down long before the contract was up.

STEPHEN DORRELL

EDWARD GARNIER

RED LEICESTER

■ STEPHEN DORRELL, the heritage secretary, says he supports his government's policy on opted-out schools, but back in his Loughborough constituency he is strangely silent on the subject.

This may be because Keith Foreman, the headmaster of Burleigh College, the most respected school in the town, has rallied governors, teachers and parents *against* opting out.

Other Leicestershire MPs are finding the same sort of difficulty. Alan Duncan, the far-right MP for Rutland and Melton, would like to proclaim how much he supports opting out, but the King Edward School in Melton Mowbray voted two-to-one last year not to opt out. Duncan thought there might be a more convenient result at the Vale of Catmose Community College, Oakham, but parents there voted 55-45 not to opt out.

Edward Garnier, the MP for Harborough, is the only MP in the county to go on boasting about opt-out schools, though even in his area no school has opted out in the last two years. In the entire county in 1993 and 1994, there have been 10 votes in mainstream schools on opting out. The score? Against opting out: 10; for opting out: er, nil.

Bright and Dutiful

"SECURITY" is the usual reason airlines give for insisting that passengers on international flights from Britain's main airports arrive at the airport two hours early. The real reason, however, is the huge revenue which comes to the British Airports Authority (BAA) from duty free shops.

"The longer they are there before their flights, the more they spend," is the prevailing philosophy. And this same issue has been raised by BAA in the heated and controversial discussions about the new fifth terminal at Heathrow. BAA insists on cutting the number of available seats for pre-flight passengers. After all, it is argued, if people are sitting down they can't be standing up at the check-out buying duty free goods.

You can write to Paul Foot at 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or leave a message for him on 071 287 3183

In the City

THERE is little evidence of festive spirit in Elm Street as the Serious Farce Office (SFO) contemplates the new and what could well be its final year in the fraud busting business.

The report on the Graham report — which signalled the SFO's demise by way of reverse take-over from the crown prosecution service's fraud investigation group (FIG) — is expected in early January. Insiders see little reason for this review, undertaken by a former cabinet office official, to differ from the findings of treasury man John Graham.

There are only three options for the SFO. Continuation in its present form — politically unacceptable given the continued expensive fiascos post-Graham. Abolition — politically difficult given that the SFO was the creation of the Tory government only six years and approaching £100 million ago. The Graham solution — a face-saving deal with something for critics, merger with FIG thereby keeping the SFO and its special investigative powers alive but bolting on more prosecutorial expertise.

The decision by attorney-general Sir Nicholas Lyell is expected by February. Meanwhile SFO staff continue to vote with their feet expecting that decision may only mean bad news. Latest departure is solicitor William Waite, off to join corporate sleuths Kroll Associates.

There is also growing speculation surrounding the position of director George Staple. His contract is due to expire in April 1995. For some time there has been talk that, come what may from Lyell, he will be returning to the City and possibly his old law firm, Coward Chance.

If Staple *is* going, his job will need to be advertised early in the new year — unless the post of director is to disappear or to be filled from within the CPS! Staple could of course stay on for a transitional period while the new regime is worked out. But in any event moves will need to be made very soon to resolve the morale-sapping uncertainty.

Certainly both Scotland Yard and the City police appear to be assuming the SFO will no longer feature so significantly. The City has so far resisted attempts by the SFO to take over the £30 million attempted fraud case involving a Barclays manager. And the Met fraud squad has kept the multi-billion Russian bank document fraud case to itself. As a result the SFO is left to pick up crumbs from provincial forces which in the heady days of the 80s and early 90s would have been dismissed as too unimportant.

FOLLOWERS of the City career of the treasury's chief secretary Jonathan Aitken will not be surprised that he gets confused about paying hotel bills. As the history of his financial services group Aitken Hume International in the last *Eye* showed, it is often others who seem to get left with the bill.

Take for example his Saudi princeling pals' bagman, Wafic Said, who ended up with 30 percent of this good thing. Wafic's Said Trust and related offshore entities bought no less than 14,250,000 Aitken Hume shares — mostly between 1985 and 1988 at prices nearer 150p than 100p — at a probable cost approaching £20 million. Another £1.6 million was anted up for preference shares in 1989. This valuable investment was worth £9.4 million when Aitken Hume's other prize mug, Lee Ming Tee, aka "Gleaming Teeth", bought Said out last September.

Lee paid 120p to 170p for most of his 14 million shares, £20 million or maybe more, bought between 1987 and 1989 plus another £1.75 million for the preference shares. His bid for the ordinary shares was just 55p indicating he had taken maybe a £15 million bath.

Not that Aitken Hume was such a disappointment for Jonathan and other members of the Beaverbrook clan whose shares were held offshore in Aitken Investments SA, in which the chief secretary declared a "minimal beneficial interest". At its peak in 1985 Aitken Investments owned 2.4 million shares. By mid-1986 the holding was down to 313,000 and soon thereafter disappeared off the radar screen. During that period the price was between 140p and 180p, so no multi-million losses there. The minimum 800,000 shares held by Aitken (English), another family firm, would also appear to have been sold by this time.

Jonathan Aitken's own shareholding in Aitken Hume has a curious history. For most of the good days of the early 80s, when the Aitken Hume price almost trebled to 215p, the MP held only 2,000 shares personally. However, he was granted a large number of options to provide the real pay-off. Unfortunately when the Aitken Hume share price failed to perform these became increasingly worthless before they could be exercised despite the option prices being reduced and reduced again.

In 1985 the Aitken Hume chairman had options on 24,700 shares at 125p and 50,000 at 133p. The following year he added a further 50,000 at 172p. By early 1987 Aitken had bought 18,000 shares and had been awarded 100,000 new options now at 140p to replace the same number issued earlier at 133p and 172p. The shares were trading between 140p and 160p at that time. But even this reduced price soon proved out of reach.

After the October 1987 crash Aitken Hume were rarely above 100p and for the next three years traded mostly between 30p and 70p. During 1988 to 1990 Aitken picked up 110,000 shares plus 12,000 preference at 100p each. And all his options, 124,720, were redone now at a more promising 58p. But even so, assuming he still held the ordinary and preference shares at the time of Lee's 55p bid, it is hard to see much if any Aitken profit.

All of which should of course be no bar to Jonathan Aitken being in charge of the nation's finances; nor disprove the value of MP's having outside interests to develop knowledge of the business world.

WHILE the Square Mile is agog with the proposed Warburg-Morgan Stanley merger, it seems other changes in the City elite may be under way. It is suggested that merchant bankers N.M. Rothschilds may be looking to unload their stake in market makers Smith New Court. Schroders is one name mentioned as a possible buyer, but there could be no shortage of interest.

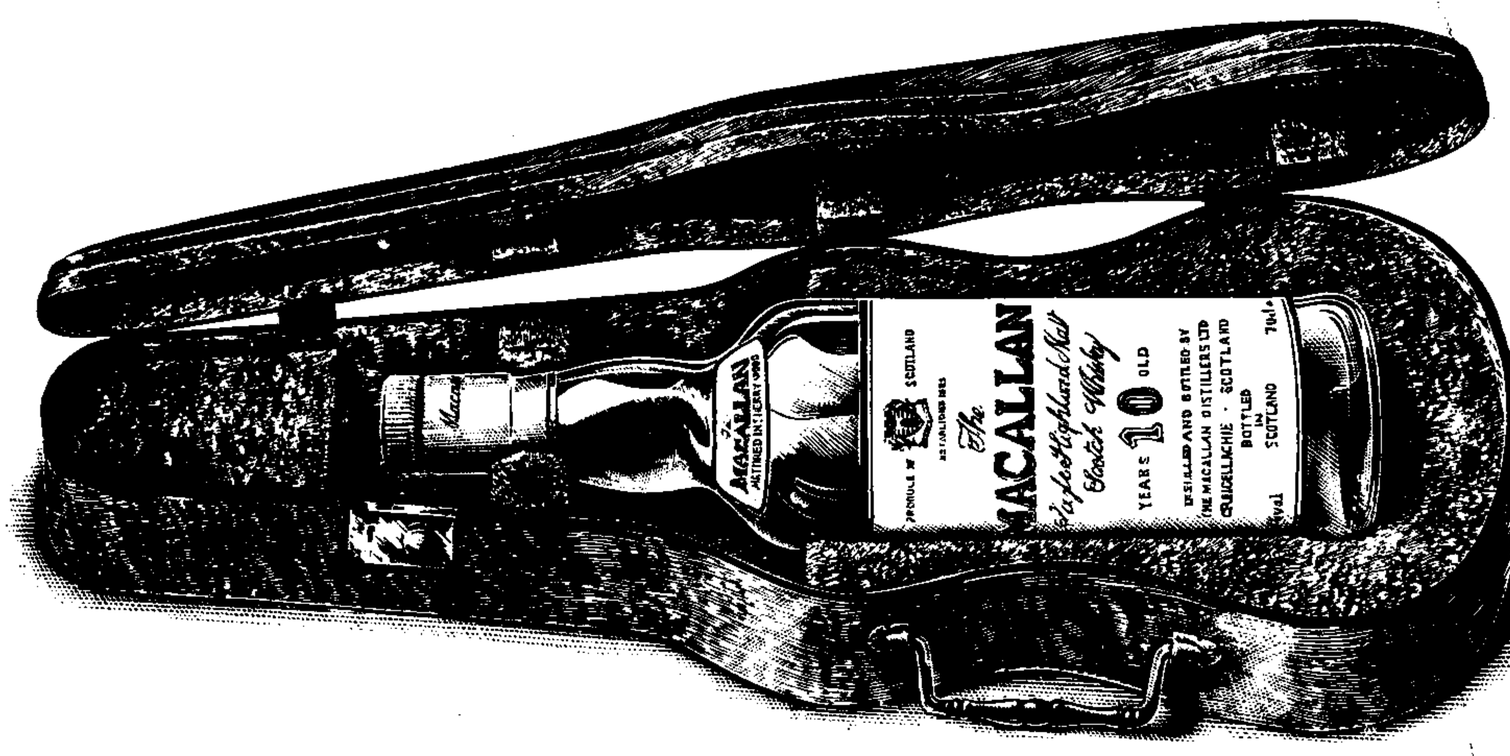
LORD TEBBIT is another Tory MP who, once he ceased to be a minister, eagerly grasped the boardroom pound. Most of the former trade secretary's appointments were in the big league — BT, BET, Sears, Blue Arrow. But one that attracted little attention was when Lord Tebbit became chairman of the little known Onix Group, run by brothers Paul and Philip Fraser, which had property, building and pub interests in the north-east.

Tebbit was appointed in November 1990 and was to be paid £8,000 rising to £25,000 a year — as much as his pay as a non-executive director at the public company Blue Arrow.

Unfortunately this promised big pay day did not materialise. Onix collapsed in July 1992 when administrators were appointed by the TSB Bank, which was owed more than £1 million. Debts were more than £1.5 million. The main subsidiary, Onix Construction, revealed a deficiency of almost £3 million with six or seven-figure debts in tax, VAT and wages. Ironically one of the larger personal creditors was Lord Tebbit — for his salary.

IT SEEMS former Guinness chairman Ernest Saunders is so well recovered from irreversible Alzheimer's Disease that not only is he back in business but he is off skiing in Austria for Christmas. Doubtless he will send a "wish you were here" card to those sympathetic court of appeal judges who released this broken wreck from prison and halved his sentence. Will medical miracles never cease?

'Slicker'



THE MACALLAN'S PLACE AS LEADER OF THE GREAT BAND of whiskies was roundly spelt out the other day in a learned magazine.

The writer mused on the meaning of the term 'Grande Marque' which, he concluded, means simply 'Big Name' – and, he went on, 'Rolls Royce, Harrods, The Macallan and Stradivarius are all *GRANDE MARQUES* in their spheres.'

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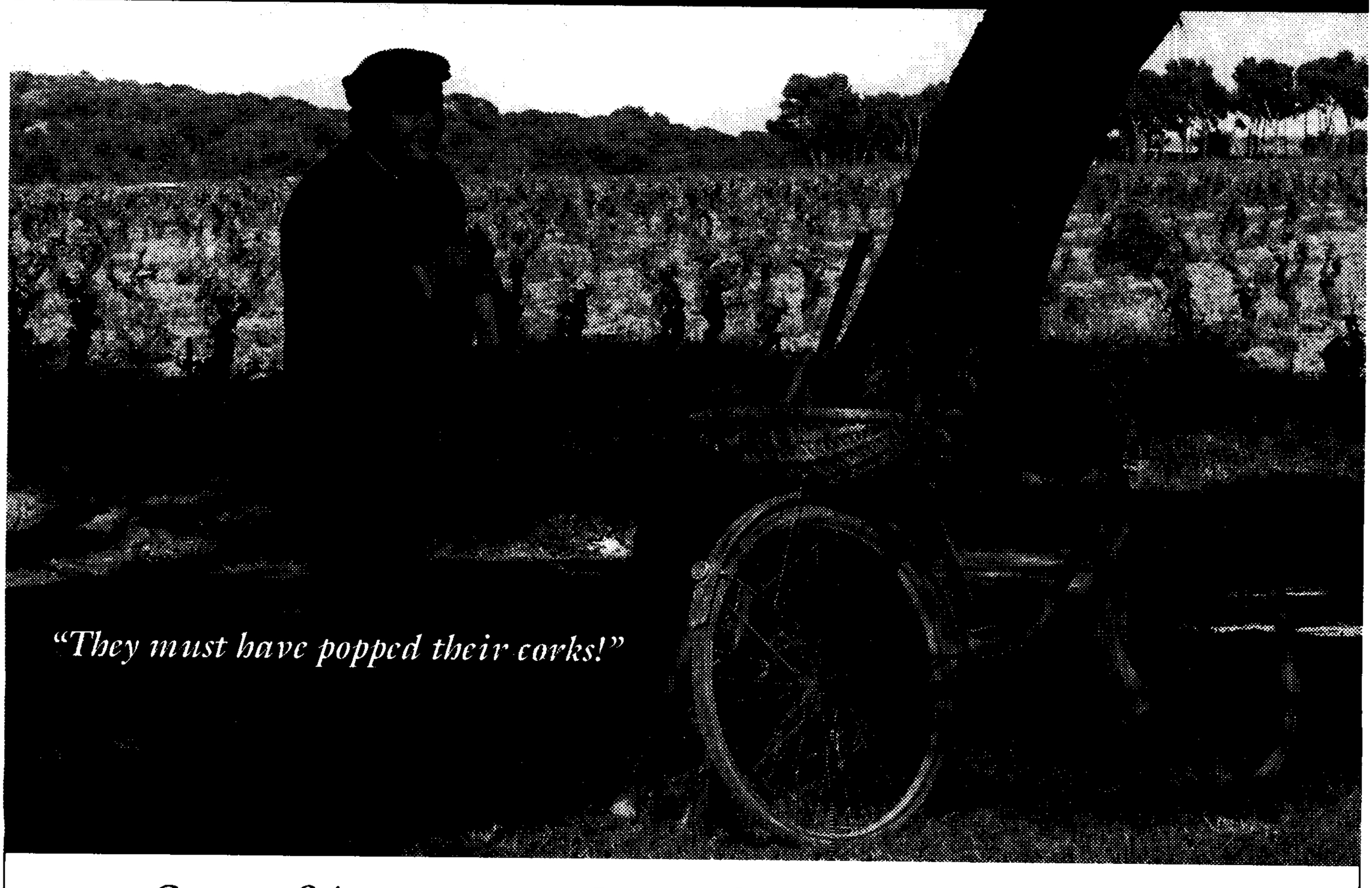

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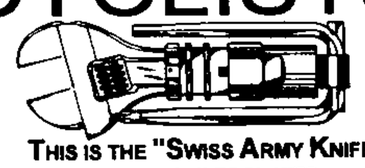

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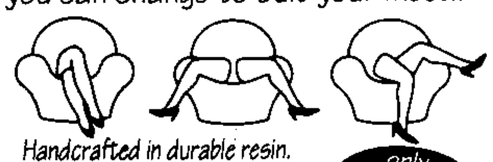

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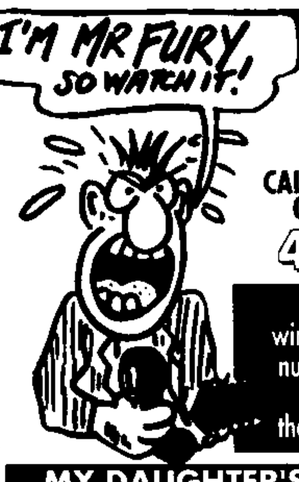

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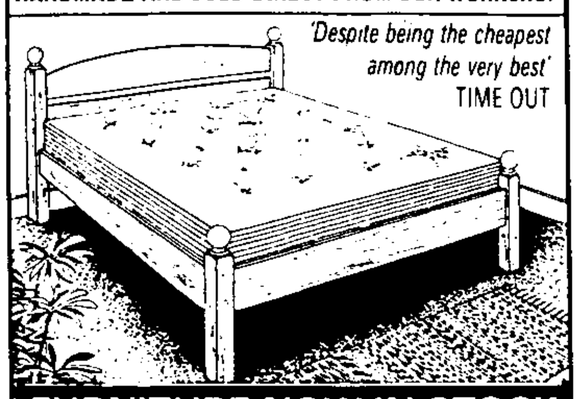

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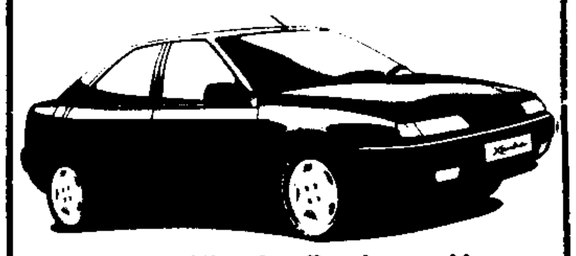

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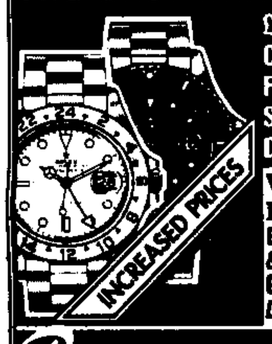

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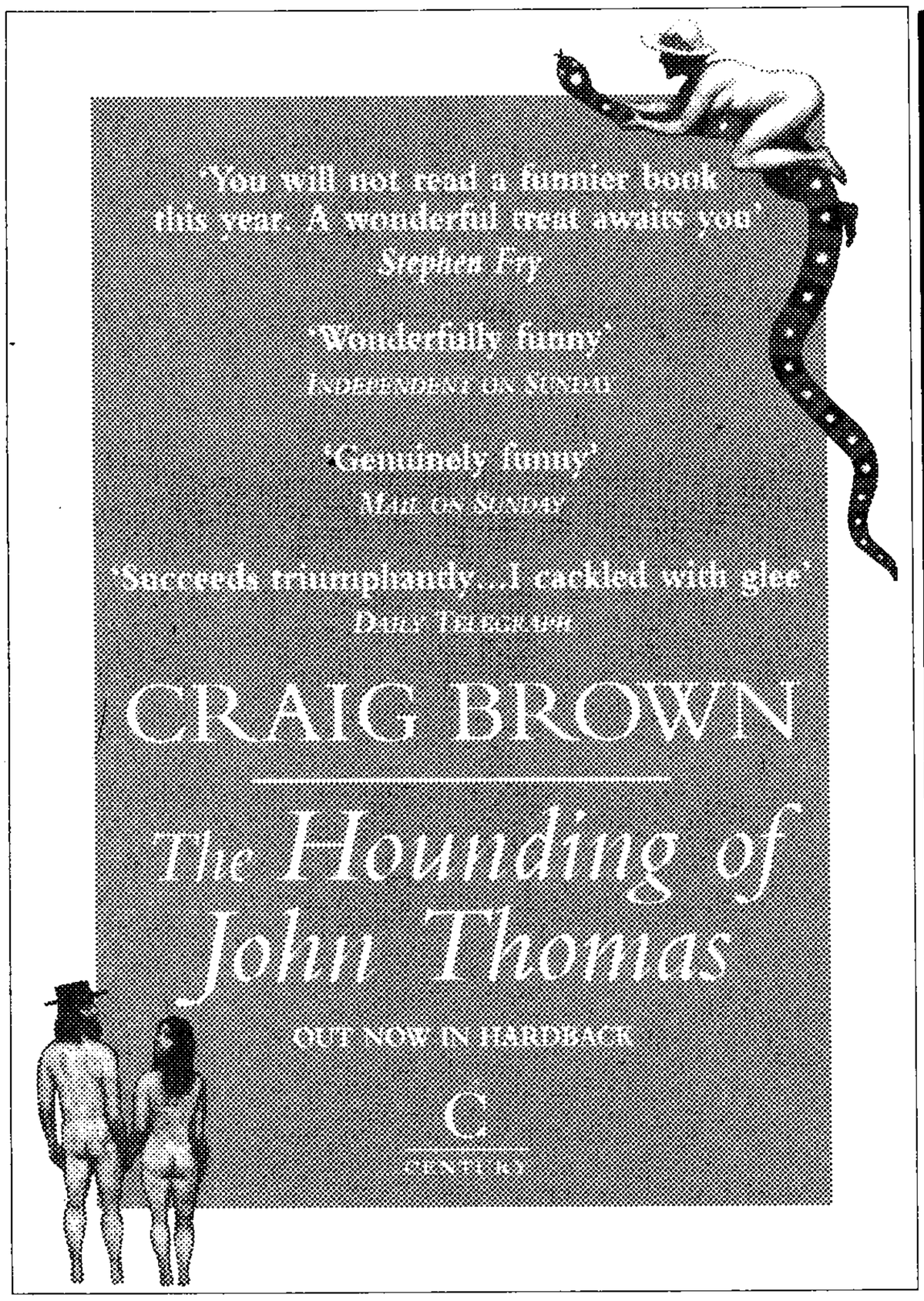

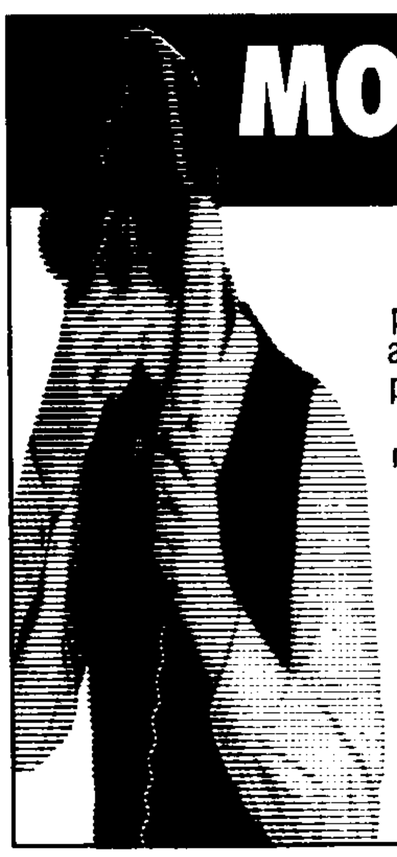
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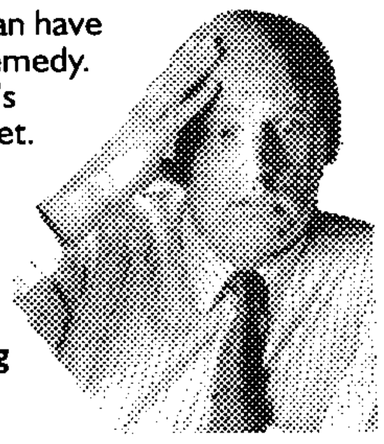

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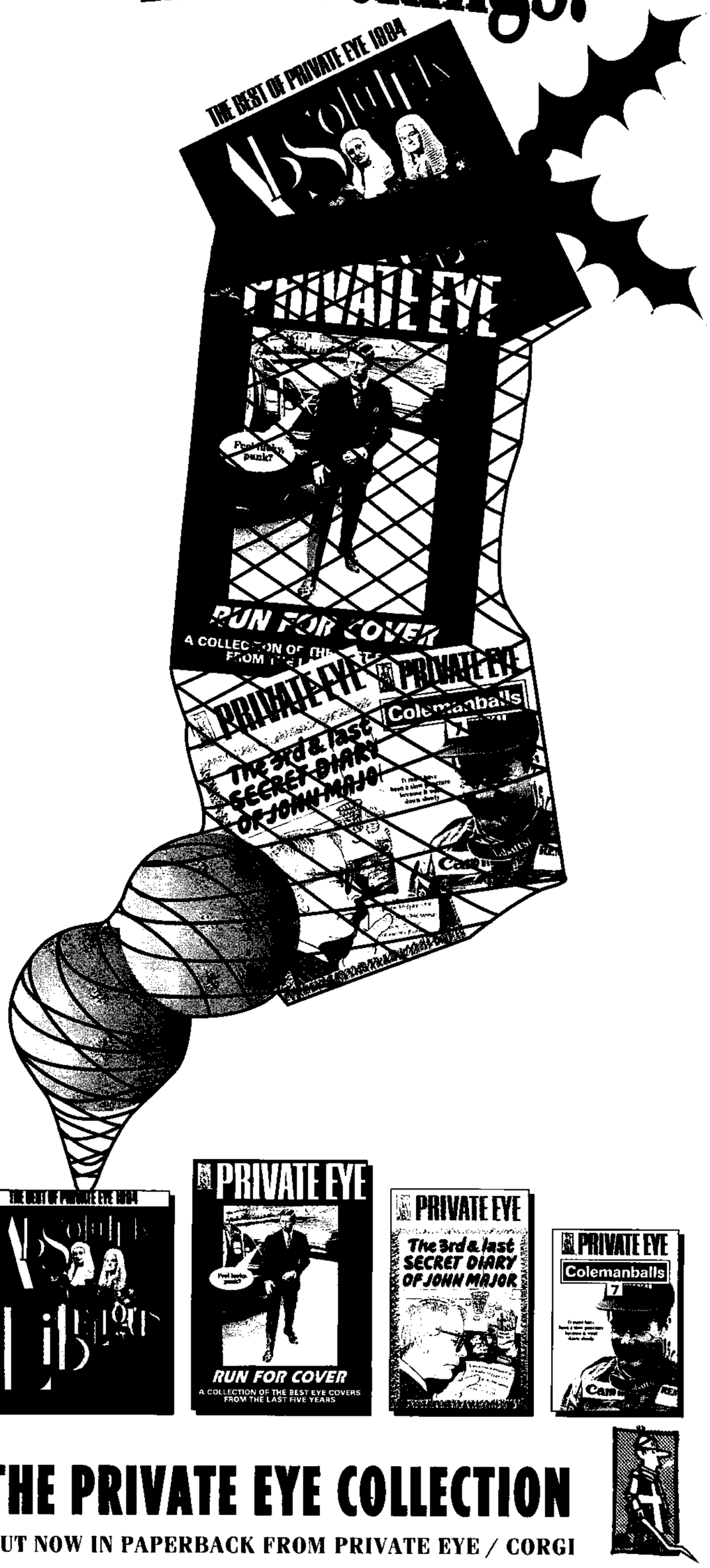
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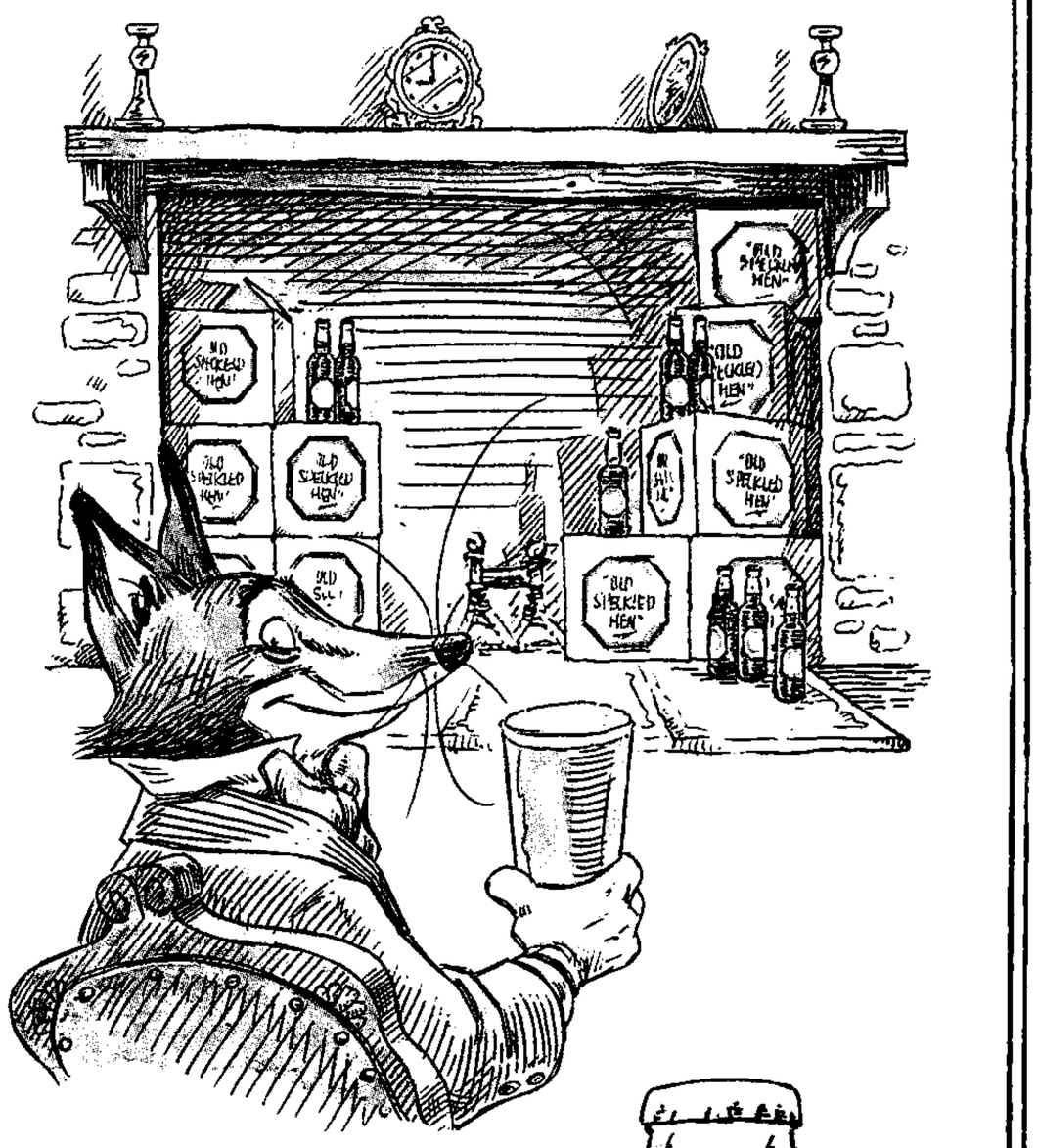
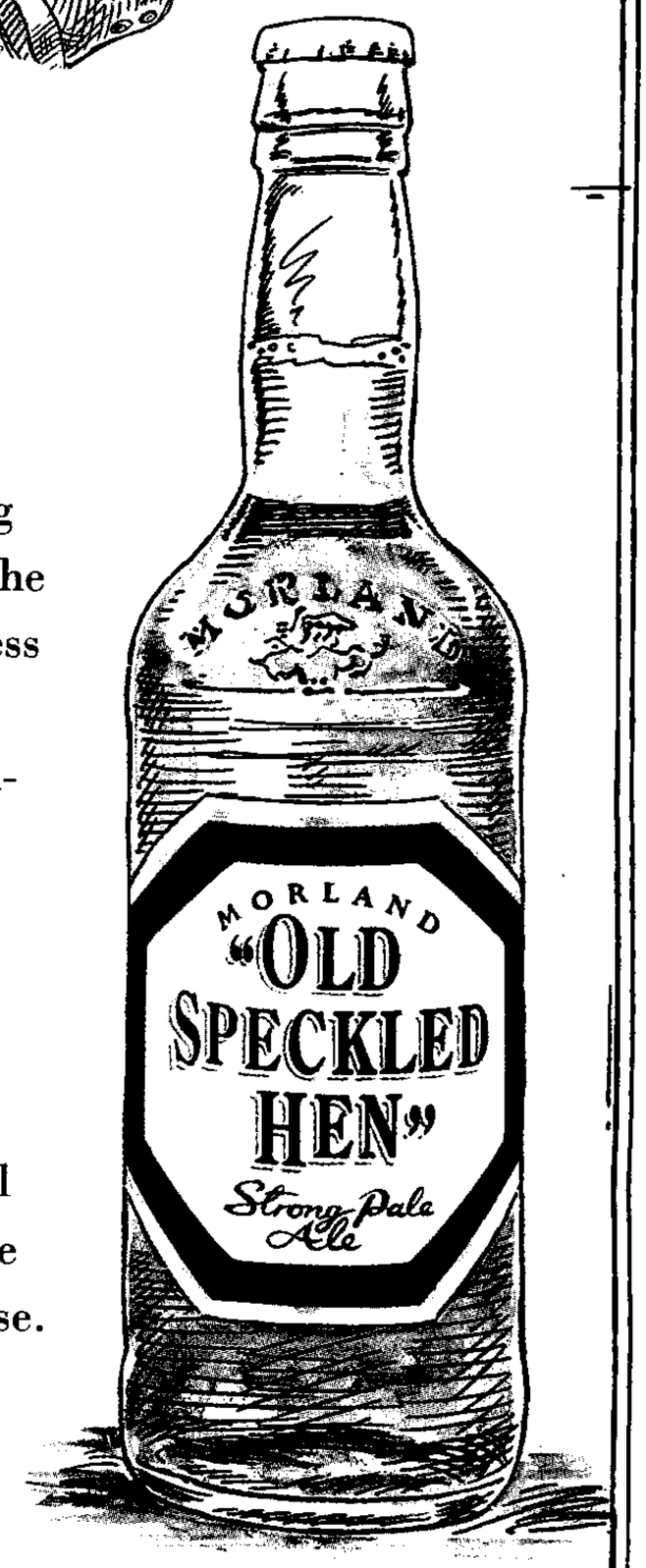


Seasonal thought.~
Knowing my drinking friends' passion for the impeccable smoothness and subtle blend of flavours of the incomparable ale, I shall start *now* to lay in a goodly store for the Christmas festivities.

Practical thought.~
Father Christmas will simply have to use the door like everyone else.



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